





Royal College  
of Nursing

# RCN branch handbook

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## Foreword



Welcome to the new branch handbook for the Royal College of Nursing (RCN).

The handbook has been written as a practical guide to help you run your branch effectively.

Branches are the lifeblood of the RCN. As an RCN activist, you can make a real difference to the working lives of RCN members as well as developing new learning opportunities for yourself. Your role in the local branch is key to the success of the RCN and I hope that you can use this handbook as both a simple, everyday guide and a reference to the more detailed branch rules.

I understand that running a branch may sometimes seem like a lonely job – but you are part of a national network of active RCN members working in every part of health service delivery. As an RCN activist and/or branch committee member, you are the voice of the RCN. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all the hard work you contribute to making the RCN the success it is today.

I hope you find the handbook a valuable and helpful resource. If you have any comments about it, please use the activist area on the website: [www.rcn.org.uk/activist](http://www.rcn.org.uk/activist) to have your say. Only your feedback will help us improve the resources you need to continue to deliver an excellent service to RCN members.

**Dr Peter Carter**  
RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary

## Introduction

The RCN has written this handbook to help you run your branch effectively and efficiently. Because branches are an essential part of the RCN's structure, rules are necessary, but these rules have been kept as simple as possible.

RCN branches form the basic membership structure of the organisation to recruit, support, develop and retain members and they provide a focus for local RCN activity and visibility. Members are able to influence policy and action at national level through their branch activities and can also develop and maintain contact with other local groups to help promote the RCN generally. The organisation and administration of the branch is carried out by members themselves, through the election of a committee.

The focus for branch meetings has been changed so that only one formal meeting needs to take place each year (the annual general meeting or AGM). This means you can focus more time and effort on exciting developmental or social events for RCN members rather than committee meetings and procedures.

If you are new to the RCN branch network, this handbook is a great starting point. As well as providing assistance for the key committee members, the chair, the secretary and the treasurer, the handbook contains useful hints and topics on recruiting members, developing activities, communications and much more.

# The RCN and its governance

## Defining RCN work – professional trade union activity

**The Royal College of Nursing is a professional trade union which represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.**

Professional trade union activities are integral to the purpose and roles of branches. Branches work in the best interest of members in the following areas:

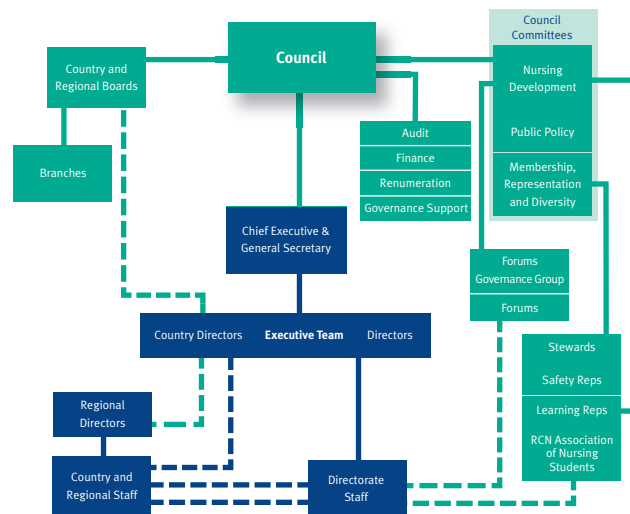
- safe and appropriate working environments
- environments free from discrimination and where diversity is valued
- a culture of lifelong learning with opportunities for continuing professional development
- practice development/innovation/leadership/excellence/clinical quality/patient safety
- workforce/skills/expertise/resources
- partnership working with employers and other stakeholders
- implementing and promoting RCN policies
- influencing/campaigning/intelligence gathering
- retention and recruitment of members and activists
- safeguarding of employment/reward.

Branches are supported in delivering this activity by:

- branch leaders
- RCN board and RCN Council members
- learning representatives
- forums
- safety representatives
- staff
- stewards.

## RCN structure

This diagram gives a simple view of how the RCN is governed and managed. Refer to Appendix three (page 45) for a more detailed description.



## RCN Council

Council members are guardians of the organisation's mission and values, acting on behalf of RCN members. They also act as charity trustees and carry legal duties and responsibilities laid down by charity law. The RCN is also subject to trade union law, employment, health and safety, data protection, human rights and other laws. Council is responsible for compliance with all these laws.

Council is responsible for the overall governance of the RCN, and has ultimate responsibility for the sustainability and the finances of the organisation.

Council is made up of 29 Council members:

- two elected by each of the 12 geographical sections (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) and nine from England
- two elected by student members (RCN Association of Nursing Students (ANS))
- the RCN President and Deputy President, elected by all members
- the Chair of RCN Congress (non-voting), who is elected by Congress voting entities.

The RCN's Chief Executive & General Secretary is appointed by Council.

The term of office for geographical Council members is four years. Elections are staggered so that they take place for half of Council every two years. The term of office of the President, Deputy President, student members and Chair of Congress is two years.

Council members are not paid to serve on Council but voluntarily give up their time to serve the RCN and its members, in their governance role.

From its membership, Council elects a Chair, Vice-Chair and Honorary Treasurer every two years.

For more details on Council committees, please refer to the RCN website [www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk).

## Congress

RCN Congress is the major annual membership event. It debates matters of importance to nursing, health and social policy. RCN Council determines the representatives who make up Congress. These representatives are supported financially for attendance at Congress. The purposes of Congress are set out in the Congress constitution, found at [www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/structure/congress\\_constitution](http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/structure/congress_constitution).

Congress also provides inspiration, learning and networking opportunities to those who attend. The event is made up of the core debating sessions attended by voting and non-voting delegates from the RCN's membership entities, plus a wide range of educational and social events, and an exhibition. It is also an important public affairs event for the RCN. Congress is widely reported on by the media, and gives the RCN an opportunity to launch new policies and publications.

### Agenda Committee

The Congress agenda is chosen by the Agenda Committee from items put forward by membership groups, (such as branches, national forums, the Association of Nursing Students, UK Stewards' Committee, UK Safety Representatives' Committee, RCN Council and RCN boards). Following debate, Congress votes on resolutions, making its views clear to Council which then decides on further actions.

If your branch is considering submitting an agenda item for Congress, then refer to the RCN website [www.rcn.org.uk/newsevents/congress](http://www.rcn.org.uk/newsevents/congress) for more details

or discuss with your regional/country board or office.

### Agenda Committee membership and election

The agenda committee consists of:

- Chair of Congress
- Vice Chair of Congress
- Chair of Council
- four members elected by Congress
- Chief Executive & General Secretary (non voting).

Any member who has been registered as attending Congress on at least two occasions in the four previous years is eligible to stand for election. The election takes place during Congress in an election year.

The term of office is two years and members of the agenda committee may not serve concurrently on Council, UK Stewards Committee or UK Safety Representatives Committee, or any national forum policy and practice group.

For further information on the Agenda Committee and its role, refer to section 48 to 58 of the Congress Constitution. This can be found on the RCN website [www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/structure/congress\\_constitution](http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/structure/congress_constitution).

## RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary, staff and officers

Appointed by Council, the RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary leads a team of over 800 UK-based staff and carries out the instructions given by Council. RCN staff work in board and regional/country offices which are located across the country, with headquarters based in London and RCN Direct in Cardiff.

# RCN Boards

## Relationship between boards and branches

There is an important relationship between branches and the board. Branches are the local organising unit of the RCN and accountable to the boards, who in turn are accountable to, and governed by, Council.

## Purpose of boards

The aim of the RCN board is to advance the work of the RCN in accordance with the main aims and objects set out in the *RCN Royal Charter*. You can find the charter at [www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/corporate\\_group\\_structure/royal\\_charter](http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/corporate_group_structure/royal_charter).

A board is an elected body and can consist of between 20 and 30 members, including:

- Council members
- representatives on the UK Stewards' Committee
- UK Safety Representatives' Committee
- UK Learning Representatives' Committee
- student representatives
- branch chairs
- fields of practice/forums.

Membership can also be determined and agreed locally by geographical and professional divisions, such as branch boundaries and fields of practice. This should all be detailed in the *Board's Regulations* document which specifies the representatives of the membership, who are elected by and from amongst the members of the RCN.

The term of office of elected members and election processes should comply with the RCN bye-laws, found at [www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/corporate\\_group\\_structure/bye\\_laws](http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/corporate_group_structure/bye_laws).

The board operates within policies determined by Council. Branches are accountable to their board, as well as to their members. Council has delegated responsibility and powers to the boards to oversee the governance of branches in each board's area, and in particular:

- agreeing the configuration and geographical boundaries of the branches
- approving the formation, merger or dissolution of branches

- monitoring and developing the work and effectiveness of the branches, ensuring that they work with the branch constitution (see *Appendix two*, page 45)
- staff administration of all branch funds.

For further information regarding appropriate powers and responsibilities that can be delegated, refer to *The RCN Charter*, Bye-laws, Rules and Board Constitution.

Boards are responsible for ensuring an annual branch review is undertaken. This can be done by using the branch success criteria and template provided (see *Appendices Six and Seven*, pages 52 and 56). It is suggested that one or more branch leaders should complete the form with the relevant staff member who supports the branch. These reviews give the opportunity to celebrate branch successes and to identify areas where branch leaders would like further staff support or development.

The outcomes of these branch reviews will be brought together into an annual branch review report to the board, so that branch development and staff support can be planned.

RCN staff work on behalf of the board. For branches to work at their optimum, it is vital that there are good partnership working relationships between boards, staff and branches.

### Branch Success Criteria

#### Is the branch compliant with the RCN branch

**constitution:** including the holding of an AGM, the election and accreditation processes, the annual branch financial statement and congress attendance. (see *Appendix two*, page 45)

#### Level of branch activity and membership

**engagement:** including the range of events in the branch programme; activities in workplace units in all sectors.

**Recruitment and retention:** membership and activist recruitment activities; the percentage of branch members as active representatives.

**Level of branch communication:** with members in the branch online community and other methods; with link members in workplace units and forums; two-way communication with the board and regional/country staff; lobbying and influencing activity.

# RCN branches

## The branch committee

The branch committee is responsible for the conduct of all branch matters, because they act on behalf of branch members. The branch committee is made of a branch chair, secretary and treasurer. All committee members are elected annually at the branch AGM. (Refer to Appendix one for a detailed description of role, see page 41).

### Electing the committee

Any member of the branch may nominate themselves for committee membership at the AGM. Each nomination requires a seconder from a branch member, and the vote is taken at the AGM. No one can hold more than one position at any one time. The maximum time you can serve on the branch committee is eight consecutive years. After this, you must have a gap of at least two years before being eligible for re-election.

The branch secretary is responsible for informing the relevant RCN national/ regional/country board office of the names of members elected or co-opted to the committee (the latter to fill any casual vacancy on the committee until the next branch AGM) immediately after their election or co-option.

### Committee accountability and responsibilities

The committee is accountable for the organisation of the branch, to the branch members at the branch AGM, and also to the regional/country board. This is partly addressed through the annual review/plan submitted to the boards.

Committee members are the recognised leaders of the branch, and are considered competent to act on behalf of the RCN at local level. As a committee member you must act within the policies of the RCN and be aware of the RCN's image in all activities and decisions.

The committee must work in partnership with local RCN staff and participate in two-way communication to ensure that local issues are fully communicated. The committee acts on behalf of the members and is responsible for:

- organising the branch and its activities in support of the RCN's mission as a professional trade union, and

according to its policies and procedures, the branch constitution, and guidance/ protocols issued by the RCN

- undertaking financial stewardship of RCN branch funds
- planning and organising a programme of events and meetings to meet the needs of members and representatives, and support membership and activist recruitment
- acting on behalf of the branch in the exercise of the rights of the branch
- nominating link representatives for forums
- identifying all the workplace units within the branch area and aiming to have a link representative in each workplace unit
- fostering activity in all workplaces within the branch area
- ratifying the workplace elections and supporting the accreditation and dis-accreditation process
- co-ordinating collective branch action on any matter affecting the interests of nurses and the nursing profession in line with RCN policy on industrial action
- promoting professional awareness and development by organising local professional activities
- lobbying on behalf of nurses, health care assistants and nursing
- regularly communicating with branch members, link members in workplaces units and forums
- having concern for the wellbeing of members
- promoting equality and diversity within all branch activities
- complying with, and promoting, the RCN Code of Conduct (see *Appendix five*, page 51) and other governance policies found at [www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/policies](http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/policies).

## Branch meetings

The branch committee is responsible for arranging a programme of meetings and events to meet the needs of members. These meetings should all have a defined purpose and members should be targeted for invitation accordingly.

### AGMs and EGMs

The branch must hold at least one branch general meeting for all members, per calendar year – the **Annual General Meeting** (AGM). This must take place in September or October, and must be properly convened with notification of the date and venue to all branch members using RCN communication channels, at least three weeks in advance of the meeting.

The purpose of the AGM is to discuss the branch annual report and financial statements up to the end of the previous financial year (31 March); to elect the branch committee and to ratify the elected RCN representatives.

An **Extraordinary General Meeting** (EGM) of the branch is convened at the chair's request or upon receipt of a written request by 20 members of the branch. Notification of the date and venue must be sent to all branch members, using RCN communication channels, at least three weeks before the meeting.

If they wish, the branch committee may set up any other sub-committees or arrange regular meetings of their branch membership.

### Quorate meetings

The quorum for any *general branch meeting*, including the AGM, is set out in the branch constitution (see Appendix two, page 45).

If a quorum ceases to be present while a meeting is in progress, the chair should stop proceedings and declare the meeting terminated. The branch may decide that the meeting can continue for discussions. The quorum rule is in place to safeguard against decisions arrived at by too small and unrepresentative a proportion of the branch.

## Workplace units within the branch area

The committee and local RCN staff will work together to identify all workplaces within the branch's geographical boundaries. This should include NHS, educational, voluntary and independent sector establishments. The branch can then establish workplace units.

The purpose of these units, which may be set up in any workplace, is:

- to provide a visible RCN presence within the workplace
- to be a point of contact to RCN members
- to recruit new members
- to provide individual or collective representation in the workplace or place of study.

The workplace units work within RCN policies and may formulate responses to the employer's consultation and negotiation on professional and employment issues arising in the workplace or place of study.

The branch can delegate appropriate roles and powers to the workplace unit but the full powers and rights remain with the branch and take precedence over the powers and rights delegated to the unit.

For further information regarding appropriate powers and responsibilities that can be delegated, refer to the *RCN Charter*, Bye-laws, Rules and Board Constitution or discuss with your regional/country office or board member.

RCN accredited representatives (stewards, safety representatives and learning representatives) for each workplace unit are elected from and by RCN members in that unit. A link representative may be elected in each workplace unit by the RCN accredited representatives in that workplace. The link representative is accountable to, and in regular communication with, the branch committee, and is responsible for co-ordinating the election of RCN stewards, safety representatives and learning representatives in that workplace. The link representative will notify the branch of the election results for branch ratification.

# Guidance for the branch chair

*There is a more detailed description of this role in Appendix one, page 42.*

The chair's contribution to the effective working of a committee can never be underestimated. This can be an exciting and influential role to undertake. A good chair brings something of their character and values to an organisation. Electing a chair can be a good opportunity for the branch to bring in a fresh perspective and the benefit of new experience. The chair or vice-chair is responsible for the efficient conduct of branch meetings and will need to have a clear understanding of the branch constitution (*Appendix two, page 45*). The constitution defines how the branch must be run.

## The ideal chair...

- knows how to interpret and apply the general principles of debate
- knows how to interpret and apply the rules of the branch
- is firm when necessary
- is lenient when relaxation of the rules is possible or desirable
- will not talk at length (except on a few formal occasions when a speech expected)
- will not impose their views on a meeting
- is fair at all times
- uses their authority without partiality or discrimination to receive the full confidence of RCN members
- reflects the values of the RCN
- is fully briefed on all items on the meeting agenda.

If you are elected chair, you must always be well prepared for a meeting and make sure you are forewarned of possible controversial or delicate items on the agenda. Get to know all the committee members and recognise the vocal and less vocal members of the committee.

As this is a leadership and facilitation role, you are responsible for welcoming and putting at ease new committee members at their first meeting. You also set the tone and style of the branch as you are usually the most quoted and conspicuous person.

Your time management is vital to the smooth running of meetings – so know the goals for each meeting and don't allow time to be wasted by developing sensitivity about when discussion is no longer helpful.

## Chairing branch events

### The chair's role in AGMs

- Arrive early as members may wish to speak to you prior to the meeting.
- Start the meeting on time and keep to time limits, but allow reasonable time for each item on the agenda.
- Facilitate discussion and encourage all members to participate.
- Bring items on the agenda to a conclusion by briefly reviewing the points. Consider inviting specific proposals or decisions from the committee.
- Check the understanding of action points and ensure that anyone who has an item to take forward confirms this understanding. Ensure timescales for action are documented in minutes.
- Take responsibility for voting procedures. When votes are taken, clarify and enact the voting procedure.
- Close the meeting and communicate the arrangements for the next meeting. Liaise with the secretary on actions resulting from the meeting.

Branch events must be controlled, so don't be embarrassed to act with authority. Talk regularly with committee members to ensure that plans are going smoothly and they fit with the objectives of the branch.

A successful branch event depends on the quality of the chair's inter-personal skills and degree of confidence, so making a lively introduction will have a good impact. Interact with members and if you are aware that a member looks reticent about making a contribution, invite them to speak.

### What is a motion?

A motion is a proposition put forward at a formal meeting, usually for the branch to take a course of action or adopt a certain position on a matter.

A motion must be within the remit of the meeting and members must be informed about it within the correct notice period, so they have time to prepare either to support or oppose a motion submitted. A motion should be positive or affirmative, asserting some fact or principle and usually suggesting suitable action. The chair will decide if a motion is correctly phrased and in order. At a committee meeting, the chair will often assist the mover to phrase the motion so that its intention is perfectly clear.

At the formal meeting, the chair will invite a seconder for the motion, where one is required, and then declare a motion open to discussion or amendment. Failure to find a seconder, where one is required, will mean the motion is dropped. (*Appendix nine outlines a formal motion procedure, page 66.*)

# Guidance for the branch secretary

*There is a detailed description of this role in Appendix one, page 42.*

As branch secretary, you are key to ensuring the right business happens at the right time, in the right place and involving the right people. Your responsibilities include:

- the proper maintenance of the branch minutes and records
- running the branch office
- preparing meeting agendas
- ordering and stocking branch publicity material and stationery
- communication with the local RCN officer
- communication with branch members on behalf of the branch.

## What are the qualities of a good secretary?

- Proactive thinking and good organisational skills are as important as good administrative skills and the ability to write clear and transparent notes.
- A good secretary is always well prepared before the meeting and carries plenty of spare copies of the agenda, relevant papers, and correspondence.
- A good secretary knows the chair and all committee members well and will be in constant touch with them all in between meetings to ensure agendas are relevant and appropriate.

## Running the branch office and data protection

You will need space to store files appropriately and safely, have access to email and internet, and provide a safe space to meet members and colleagues to discuss branch business.

With this in mind, the safe storage and handling of personal data must be organised in line with the Data Protection Act 1998.

## Data Protection in brief

The Data Protection Act gives eight principles of good practice and the six conditions that must be met for personal information to be considered fairly processed.

It also gives details on handling sensitive data such as: racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or other beliefs, trade union membership, physical or mental health condition, sex life, criminal proceedings and convictions – and how this information must be processed.

As well as the seven rights identified in the act, the act also creates a number of criminal offences and therefore the branch committee must be aware of the requirements of the Data Protection Act when they collect or handle data about an individual.

Data must not be disclosed except where there is written consent or a statutory requirement, and never over the telephone. Data must not be sent to outside agencies before discussing with the RCN regional/country office. This data includes email addresses and mobile telephone numbers.

Only personal information collected that is relevant to the carrying out of the legitimate purposes and function of the RCN must be requested, and such information should be as accurate as possible.

Sensitive data as defined in the act must be protected as required with appropriate security and held in an environment as secure as possible. So you will need to ensure that hard copy branch and member records are kept in a secure, fireproof cabinet. If records are stored electronically, ensure they are password protected. The branch committee will be responsible for ensuring that all regular data care procedures are fully and conscientiously followed.

Data no longer required for the legitimate purposes of the RCN must be regularly purged – contact your regional/country office for further advice.

No data can be passed to a third party for processing without discussing with your regional/country office beforehand.

Any request for data based on a legal requirement (for example, from the police or other body) must be referred to your regional/country office to handle.

The branch has a duty to protect individual's data from accidental disclosure (this is also true for RCN representatives), therefore:

- a) do not give out passwords to other people, who will then have access to the data you are entitled to view
- b) do not recycle paper reports that contain personal data
- c) take due care to ensure that data is not left about on laptops or in files, either in or out of the office, where they can be accessed by unauthorised personnel.

This information does not go into the finer details of the act, but provides practical advice and guidance.

**If you are in doubt, don't give it out** and contact your regional/country office for further advice or email [dataprotection@rcn.org.uk](mailto:dataprotection@rcn.org.uk).

For further advice on the Data Protection Act you can go to [www.rcn.org.uk/direct](http://www.rcn.org.uk/direct).

A further reference source is the Information Commissioner's website, at [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk) (web) (accessed 20/10/08).

## Using the RCN logo



When you use RCN headed paper, you are representing the views of the organisation. You should therefore reflect carefully on what you write under the RCN's logo. Headed paper for use by branches is available as part of the stationery and noticeboard materials kit, see page 26. Letter templates are available on the Activist Zone on the RCN website [www.rcn.org.uk/activist](http://www.rcn.org.uk/activist).

If you are making posters for branch events, only ever use the RCN regional/country logo. Any use of the main RCN logo must be authorised by a member of the RCN Communications department at RCN HQ – 020 7409 3333. Refer to your RCN Officer if you need further advice. Again, templates for posters and leaflets are available to order from RCN Direct, see page 26 for further information.

## Using technology and email etiquette

Appropriate use of email provides a fast, consistent and cheap way of sending messages and documents. However, using email inappropriately can result in problems which can range from users suffering from information overload to legal claims being made against the RCN.

Be careful what you say in emails. These messages are documents and can be used as evidence in a court of law if requested. Messages sent by email can also be accessed by others as well as the intended recipient.

If you are sending a lot of lengthy emails, consider whether it may be appropriate instead to send a short email which recipients may find easier to read, with links to appropriate websites where recipients can find more detailed information. In this case, you could consider using a community area on the RCN website [www.rcn.org.uk/development/communities](http://www.rcn.org.uk/development/communities).

Be vigilant: computer viruses can be spread through email systems. Ensure your computer is properly protected with a firewall and anti-virus software.

## Meetings and events

As branch secretary you may be responsible for ensuring that meetings and events happen, that everyone knows where to go and what time to be there, and that everyone knows what they are supposed to be doing when they get there.

Before formal meetings such as the branch AGM, check the minutes of the previous meeting to ensure all instructions from that meeting have been carried out. It is good practice to consult with the chair regarding the agenda to ensure that any suggestions or comments from them and other committee members are included.

You are also responsible for notifying members of how they can submit items for the agenda.

Remember that under the new branch constitution, you may only need to have one formal meeting a year (the AGM) and it is likely that branch events will not require the same formalities.

## Example agenda for a formal meeting

### 1 Apologies for absence

It is as important to know who is not there as it is to know who is.

**2 Minutes of the previous meeting**

This is a check for accuracy, not to repeat the debates.

**3 Matters arising**

To report on actions taken or issues that remain on-going and which are not elsewhere on the agenda.

**4 Correspondence**

This includes all letters to and from the branch and any information and requests received from the RCN.

**5 Branch Finance Report**

An up to date position on the branches financial position and expenditures should be given as part of the report.

**6 Local matters**

These matters may be in respect of places of work, other professional groups, or the general public.

**7 Reports from stewards, safety representatives and learning representatives**

This is an opportunity to share best practice and successes.

**8 Board member update/report, and branch workplace units**

Keep your board member on an open invite to your branch meetings.

**9 Speaker / guest**

Consider inviting local MPs, campaign groups, or patients groups to give you a broader perspective on nursing.

**10 Any other business**

Agree what goes here with the branch chair before the meeting starts.

**11 Date and venue of next meeting**

Check everyone knows when and where you'll be meeting next time.

**Matters arising**

It is common practice to combine items for report under an umbrella heading entitled "Matters arising". It is placed third on the agenda.

The purpose of matters arising is to tell committee members of developments arising out of previous business for which no provision has been made on the agenda. No points of substance should be listed as they should have their own agenda item.

**Correspondence and records**

All correspondence must be noted on the agenda for the forthcoming committee meeting. It is the secretary's responsibility to take all letters and emails to the branch meeting, read them out, and ensure an appropriate response is made.

Old correspondence which gives factual information about dates of meetings and apologies for absence etc. can be discarded after one year. Correspondence about setting up specific events, awards or policy, constitutional or internal management letters should be stored in a safe place for two years, because this information may be required as part of an audit or investigation.

**Taking notes and writing minutes**

When you are taking notes during the meeting, note especially the chair's interim and final summaries. In most instances this is all that is required in the minutes. The chair should explain any unfamiliar terms or expressions. Ask if you have not fully understood a point.

The minutes are an essential record of meetings and should correspond to the agenda. It can be helpful to leave a space in your notes between each item, so you have space available should the discussion later return to an earlier point.

The style of minutes will vary depending on the type of meeting. Formal committees may require very detailed minutes, but more informal meetings may simply produce an action list of things to be done as a result of the meeting.

All minutes should show what points were aired, what decisions were taken, and what action is required and by whom. Ideally you should write the minutes from the rough draft as soon as possible while the material is fresh in your mind. Keep your notes until the minutes have been approved.

The minutes should be accurate, brief and clear. Put any actions to be taken in a prominent place after each item, with the name of the person responsible by its side. Have a separate action column if necessary.

The minutes should be given to the chair for approval and then circulated to committee members as soon as possible after the meeting. You should also attach a copy of the minutes to the agenda for the next meeting. You are also required to publish the minutes for members to access. If the branch has its own RCN web space, you could achieve publication by uploading the minutes to the branch's online community.

### Helpful tips for minute writing

- Always include background details: the subject being discussed, the people involved at the meeting, dates, times, places and the branch name.
- Only record key points.
- Note any conclusions or action points.
- Break up notes by using paragraphs, headings, bullet points or numbers.
- Highlight key words or points by underlining, using bold or coloured pens.
- Use wide margins to allow extra notes to be added as necessary.

## Organising an AGM

The branch Annual General Meeting (AGM) is the one meeting in the year that the branch must hold for all the branch members. Under the 2008 Constitution this meeting should be held during September or October each year. This is a change from the previous constitution.

The purpose of the AGM is for:

- the branch committee to report to the members on their activities of the past year. You could produce a written annual report or the chair could give a verbal annual report. Members should then have the opportunity to ask questions and make suggestions for future activities. This is the time that branch members can hold the committee members accountable for their work in organising the branch
- the branch members to consider the branch financial statements for the previous year. The branch treasurer should obtain the branch's annual financial statement from the regional/country office – there must be enough copies for the members to look at it. Members have the right to question the committee and hold them accountable for their financial governance of branch funds
- the branch members to elect the branch committee members for the next year
- the branch members to ratify the RCN representatives who have been elected in the workplace units. (*Refer to the RCN process for accrediting representatives in Appendix four, page 48*).

### Practicalities

- Start planning in May.
- Consider where the meeting will be held and whether you need to order refreshments.
- The committee sets the date and the secretary books the venue.
- Appoint someone to organise the elections (a returning officer).
- Consider organising a speaker after the formal business of the AGM to attract members to come to the meeting.
- Consider appointing one of the committee to act as host for the meeting. This will involve welcoming people at the door, particularly members who have never been to a branch meeting.

### Telling members

- You must announce details of your branch AGM in *RCN Bulletin* which is sent to all RCN members.
- If you have one, announce details in your branch online community.
- Contact your regional or country office early to find out the deadline for submitting information to *RCN Bulletin*.
- Include the date, time and venue of the meeting, as well as information about how members can stand for election to the committee.

### Paperwork

- Agree the agenda with the chair before the meeting.
- Decide whether the annual report will be a written or verbal report, and establish who will write the report if appropriate.
- Get a copy of last year's minutes.
- Remind the treasurer to get the annual financial statements from the regional/country office in time for the AGM.
- Remind the person organising the election that a ballot form may be required.
- Get a copy of the RCN protocol for accrediting representatives.
- Get an up-to-date list of representatives for ratification.
- All paperwork will need to be copied for the members attending the meeting.

### During the meeting

- The chair will run the meeting.
- You are responsible for making all the physical arrangements and taking the minutes.

### After the meeting

- Draft the minutes and get them agreed by the chair.
- File the minutes somewhere safe and secure for referral at the next AGM.
- Inform the regional/country office of the elected branch committee members and the representatives who have been ratified. Do this immediately to ensure this is not forgotten.

## Organising an election

The conduct of these elections should be in accordance with the RCN's bye-laws procedures and regulations for elections and in conjunction with the Branch Constitution (*see Appendix two*, page 45).

The bye-laws can be found at:  
[www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/corporate\\_group\\_structure/bye\\_laws](http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/corporate_group_structure/bye_laws) .

All nominations and elections are conducted at the AGM, therefore organising an election can be quite a challenge. You will need a clear process in place to ensure a fair and unbiased outcome. A few points to consider:

- ensure notification is sent out at least three weeks before the meeting to allow sufficient time for members to participate in the election
- communications to members should clearly identify the committee roles up for election, and what duties the RCN expects of these elected post-holders (*use the role descriptors in Appendix one*, page 42)
- ensure the venue is big enough to accommodate attendance
- allow plenty of time on the AGM agenda for the elections
- decide whether elections may be by a secret ballot or a show of hands at the meeting.

### Returning officer

The elections for the branch committee will include an election for the position of secretary. It is a conflict of interest for the secretary to organise this election. So someone else, who is not going to stand for election, should be appointed returning officer and they will organise the election.

# Accreditation of RCN representatives

RCN representatives can act as stewards, safety representatives or learning representatives. For many members, representatives are the local face of the RCN and the person they will contact for immediate help or advice. The representatives' role is covered by legislation which sets out their functions and their rights. They must be elected by members in the workplace – the branch is the body which is responsible for this process. The procedure defined here aims to:

- ensure a consistent approach to the accreditation and dis-accreditation of representatives across the UK
- streamline the process so members who have been nominated/elected are accredited more quickly and can then access learning and development to support their role
- confirm that the branch is the final arbiter in the process
- ensure that members considering becoming a representative should have a clear idea of the RCN's expectation of their responsibilities and how they will be supported
- integrate accreditation with the RCN's work on future activists. Accredited representatives need to have the required skills and knowledge obtained through learning and development in order for them to perform effectively in their role
- formally accredit the representative so that they have the authority to act as a lay official on behalf of the RCN and will be covered by the ACAS Code of Practice 3 on time off for trade union duties and activities.
- Go to the RCN website for further information about the roles and responsibilities of representatives [www.rcn.org.uk/support/becoming\\_activist](http://www.rcn.org.uk/support/becoming_activist).

## The procedure for electing and accrediting representatives

*Please refer to the flowchart in Appendix four: Summary of Representative's accreditation and administration process (page 50).*

### Election

Members in the workplace should have the opportunity

to elect their representatives, so a workplace election will need to take place. Once a member has become a representative they should be encouraged to get involved in the branch. The branch secretary or another representative can help organise the election.

The RCN activists' noticeboard materials and stationery kit has templates that can be used to notify members of an election. This can be downloaded from the activist area of the website [www.rcn.org.uk/activist](http://www.rcn.org.uk/activist).

In order to hold an election, permission should be obtained from the workplace management to hold a short meeting in work time. The election should be publicised as widely as possible among RCN members at the workplace, ensuring that those who work part-time or on shifts can vote.

Notification of a workplace election should be given to members at least two weeks beforehand and an attendance list recorded at the meeting. When the meeting is advertised, members should be reminded that they should be ready to produce proof of membership, normally by way of a valid membership card.

Where the branch is not active or there are no other representatives in the workplace, an RCN officer should help with the election. This support may probably be required in independent sector workplaces.

### Ratification

Once a representative is elected in the workplace, the RCN branch must ratify the result of the election. Ideally the two people who originally nominated the member should attend the branch meeting to support the representative. Where the branch is inactive and not arranging any meetings, the authority to ratify an election can be vested in the chair of the RCN Board.

Ratification can be authorised outside a formal meeting, if none are to be arranged for a period of time and it would be deemed to cause an unnecessary delay in accrediting a representative to wait until the next meeting. This approach can only be authorised by the committee members adhering to the accreditation and administration process outlined in Appendix four.

If the branch fails to ratify the election, its members must be prepared to justify this decision. However, there is no right of appeal at this stage as accreditation has not yet taken place.

## Annual ratification

There is a process of annual ratification for all RCN representatives which takes place at the branch AGM. This ratification confirms the representatives' role unless they choose to resign because they are retiring, changing employment or for other reasons. The reasons for resignation should be captured in the minutes and followed up where appropriate. A representative who changes employer may be willing to be re-accredited to the new workplace, in which case a new workplace election must take place.

Annual ratification gives the branch the opportunity to ensure that representatives are active and are fulfilling their role. The branch can decide that representatives should not be ratified for various reasons:

- the representative has breached the RCN code of conduct (*see Appendix five, page 51*)
- the representative has not responded to the letter from the branch secretary
- the representative is no longer in membership
- the representative has failed to attend relevant RCN representative training. (There may however be justifiable reasons for this failure and any extenuating circumstances should be taken into account)
- the branch is not satisfied that the representative is actively carrying out the role.

The branch must be able to substantiate the withdrawal of accreditation and communicate this to the representative. The representative will have the right of appeal. This process can be found within the RCN's by-laws, rules procedures and regulations; it is generally known as Rule 6. The RCN website link is: [www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/corporate\\_group\\_structure](http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/corporate_group_structure) (Web) (Accessed 20/10/08)

The branch can decide to use their authority to dis-accredit at any time between AGMs. Again the right of appeal still applies.

# Annual branch review – developing a branch annual plan

Planning the activities of the branch on an annual basis will help with preparation for events and communications with members. It will also help the branch committee consider priorities, identify key objectives for the branch, consider financial implications and identify support required from RCN staff.

Once the branch starts planning in this way, it can review its activities against the plan and celebrate its successes or discuss why objectives were not met. The plan needs to have some flexibility built in, so that unforeseen circumstances can be managed.

The branch, with support from the regional/country office and the regional/country board, should create an annual plan/review template based on a number of agreed principles, such as (but not of course limited to) reference to the *RCN Strategic plan*, implications on resources, consideration to diversity and equality, and setting realistic goals.

You'll find a plan template in *Appendix seven* (page 56) and the success criteria form in *Appendix six* (page 52). These can also be downloaded from [www.rcn.org.uk/branchhandbook](http://www.rcn.org.uk/branchhandbook).

These have been developed to help you generate discussion about, and formulate your plan. Or you can use them as a basis to create your own. These templates already incorporate the principles mentioned above, plus much more.

When compiling your plan and review, bear in mind also the Branch Success Criteria's main headings, (see *Appendix six*, page 52), agreed in the 2007 Branch Review:

- branch compliance with the RCN branch constitution
- level of branch activity and membership engagement
- recruitment and retention of members and representatives
- level of branch communication.

## Developing the plan

1. **When to plan?** Establish the plan following the branch AGM, when the branch committee members are in place. The branch executive committee is the appropriate group to propose the plan, but they may want to involve other members such as RCN representatives.
2. **Review the previous year.** Consider what went well. This might include regular meetings, good attendance, increases in number of members or representatives, a successful conference or study day, involvement in lobbying or campaigning, fundraising activity.

Consider what planned activities the branch did not achieve, and why. For example, a planned study day had to be cancelled through lack of support. What lessons can be learned from this?

3. **Mark on a year planner all the national RCN events:** AGM, Congress, Council meetings.
4. **Mark on a year planner all the regional/country board events:** board meetings, any regional/country conferences, regional/country representative meetings.
5. **Agree a date** for the following year's branch AGM and note on the planner.
6. **Generate ideas for activities.** Think about the RCN's mission: "*The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies*". Use the ten strategic goals detailed in the *RCN's Strategic plan 2008- 2013*, to promote discussion. What can the branch do under each of the goals? (see page 19)
7. **It is all too easy to 'over do' the number of activities,** so agree to a minimum number of events or activities. Some suggestions:
  - run a member recruitment campaign
  - run a representative recruitment campaign
  - contact local forum groups and develop joint activities
  - arrange a study day or branch conference

- network with adjacent branches and plan joint events
  - identify a local issue and focus on this. For example: violence, changes to a service, nutrition campaign
  - promote the branch to local independent sector organisations.
  - submit an agenda item to Congress or set up a fringe event
  - develop a local RCN newsletter
  - arrange an event on Nurses' Day.
8. **Branch meetings** – once you have organised the date for your annual required branch meeting (the AGM), decide if you need any further meetings and plan dates. Don't be too ambitious – it's better to run fewer really successful meetings which attract good attendance, than monthly meetings where very few members come along. You could consider holding events such as talks or learning sessions which branch members may find useful and interesting to attend.

The branch committee may wish to meet on a regular basis to conduct any branch business such as the ratification of a workplace election of a representative.

9. **How you will communicate with members?** Can you mail the plan for the year to all members? Can you rely on members accessing information on the website? Are notice boards available in every site covered by the branch and do you have a reliable member who can keep them up to date?
10. **Consider finances.** As your plan develops, think about the financial and other resources you will need to implement it. Does the branch have sufficient funds available? If not, contact your regional/country office with a detailed request for additional resources. There may be extra monies available and the office may be able to help with a staff resource, for example to support a study day or conference.

## Completing the annual branch review

RCN Council has agreed that boards should undertake an annual review and plan of the branches in their area, in order to carry out their governance responsibility.

The reviews can be completed by the branch committee ideally or by the secretary, who would send the completed form to the regional/country office. Alternatively the review can be completed by a branch committee member together with the RCN officer who supports the branch. The branch member elected to the regional/country board should also be involved if not already a committee member.

The review should be an opportunity to celebrate branch successes and to identify any additional staff support or development needed.

The information you provide will be made available to the region/country boards to enable them to monitor branch activity and to plan future branch support.

## Using the RCN's Strategic Goals to generate branch activities

- **Build a membership organisation which values both the professional and trades union functions, and whose power is enhanced by their working together**  
**ACTION** You could consider activities encompassing both values, for example by networking with other branches and forums.
- **Engage the full breadth of clinical and workforce talents, experience, and expertise of members and staff.**  
**ACTION** You could arrange study/training days, ensuring that they are relevant for the audience – try focusing on their development, aiming to enhance their knowledge and skills.
- **Strengthen the RCN as the leading authority on nursing in health and social care.**  
**ACTION** For example you could consider engaging with local health scrutiny committees or attending local health forums in the community.
- **Embrace the wider nursing family, furthering strategic activities in our membership make-up, our networks, and with employer organisations that recognise the RCN.**  
**ACTION** Consider a recruitment campaign for membership as well as for activists. Training/development days could focus on promoting development opportunities which could be adapted to meet specific health care workers and activists.
- **Campaign for nursing, health care and patients.**  
**ACTION** Consider local lobbying of MPs, MSPs, AMs, or organising a Congress fringe event, or submitting an agenda item at Congress.
- **Strengthen accountability in our governance structure.**  
**ACTION** Plan your branch's AGM and consider attendance at the RCN's AGM.
- **Maximise the RCN's contribution to improving the health and well-being of the national, EU, and international population.**  
**ACTION** Consider contributing to a consultation on a document that has been circulated at national level that will impact locally.
- **Enabling structures and processes to value diversity.**  
**ACTION** Taking into account the diverse make-up of your branch's membership, ensure all its activities are accessible and appropriate. Consider study/training/recruitment campaigns that will promote such groups to engage with the RCN, as members and activists.
- **Build the RCN as a business, to enable an efficient membership organisation.**  
**ACTION** Consider the resources to be used for events and activities by planning the branch's spending for the coming year to maximise value for money.
- **Communicate the responsibilities the RCN has given its current charitable status and consider how this should develop in the future.**  
**ACTION** When deciding on activities and events, you could think about ways these events promote a positive image of the RCN and the branch. Also consider opening study days to non-members (though you will have to charge them for attendance).

The *RCN Strategic plan 2008-2013* can be downloaded from [www.rcn.org.uk/publications](http://www.rcn.org.uk/publications) (publication code 003 250).

# Guidance for the branch treasurer

This section gives branch treasurers background information to help them carry out their duties effectively as an elected honorary officer of their local RCN Branch. *(There is a detailed description of this role in Appendix one, page 42.)*

## RCN financial system

The RCN Finance Department is responsible for the management of the RCN's finances, in accordance with the law and Council's policies. All monies held by branches belong to the RCN and are incorporated in total funds in the RCN's financial statements and reported within the RCN's statutory annual accounts. As a charity, our activities are open to scrutiny by the public, and all expenditure should be capable of being robustly defended in the case of any query from a donor, the Charity Commission, RCN members, or the media.

A new system of branch financial management was implemented from April 2007. This guidance is written based on that new system.

The RCN has a corporate bank account with the banking group of National Westminster/Royal Bank of Scotland/Ulster Bank. All branches have a sub-account of this corporate account. **No branch may open any other bank account except within the RCN corporate account.** The signatories on all these branch accounts will be the signatories from the regional/country office.

Every cheque must be signed by two of these signatories. This corporate system is to protect RCN funds and to ensure appropriate segregation of duties to protect those involved in the process – both members and staff. Non compliance with this guidance, including any member opening any other account with RCN monies, could be taken to indicate fraudulent action or abuse of the RCN's funds.

The July 2007 session of Council decided that, by October 1 2007, all branches shall be administered using the **staff administration** model: this is where the staff at the country or regional office pay the bills and expenses on receipt of a requisition form with supporting receipts, signed by a branch officer or other nominated person to authorise the payment. In effect, the staff do the book-keeping.

The following principles apply to this model:

- **local member control** of branch finances
- **local accountability** for branch expenditure of charitable funds within the *RCN Charter* purposes
- **appropriate financial controls** to ensure probity and the management of risk
- **fundraising incentives** for branches
- **simplicity** of local access, recognising that treasurers are volunteers with limited time and 'bookkeeping' expertise
- **fit for purpose** for a 21st century organisation
- **balance of local autonomy and UK corporacy.**

Cheques will be issued to the branch treasurer, by the designated RCN staff, in accordance with the cheque requisition/branch expenses/Congress advance procedure. Treasurers will, however, also have access to a petty cash float of up to £50.

Your first point of contact for any branch financial queries should be the administrator for your branch account. Your regional/country office can tell you who this is.

## What qualities do you need to be branch treasurer?

### The ideal treasurer

Branches require someone who can adopt an orderly approach to the organisation of branch funds. The main qualities for a treasurer are:

- good financial understanding and the ability to explain to members the branch's financial activities
- confidence to deal with money at the level the branch normally handles – usually in hundreds rather than thousands
- personal integrity about financial propriety and accountability
- commitment to achieving the common aims of the branch.

Book-keeping and the maintenance of orderly accounts is not the only purpose of the treasurer; the treasurer is there to facilitate the activities of the branch by

providing financial guidance. The committee must be able to rely on the treasurer's control, but they may need to be persuaded that accounts are not merely uninteresting figures on money which has been spent! In fact, branch accounts provide a record of how effectively the branch is operating.

## Branch treasurer's duties

The duties and responsibilities of the treasurer are summarised below. The remainder of this section deals with how to carry out these duties.

- To be responsible for the financial stewardship of branch funds on behalf of the committee.
- To protect branch funds from fraud and abuse.
- To ensure that any branch money spent complies with the objectives of the RCN as embodied in the *RCN Charter*.
- To advise the branch and committee on financial matters.
- To present financial information to the branch and the committee.
- To present annual financial statements to the branch annual general meeting.
- To carry out all the functions of a member of the committee.

## What can RCN money be spent on?

Branch funds are all RCN money, although designated as under the control of the branch for spending decisions. Details of branch funds have to be consolidated into the RCN annual accounts. Because the RCN is a charity, branch money can only be used to fulfil the RCN's charitable purposes, which are set out in the *RCN Charter*. Branch leaders are therefore responsible under charity law for the financial stewardship and probity of the funds under their control.

Although giving money to relieve poverty may be a worthy cause, you cannot use RCN monies for that purpose. The branch cannot make donations to other bodies.

RCN funds must not be used to buy gifts for long serving committee members or similar persons, although, you can arrange a collection of money from

branch members to buy a present (without involving RCN funds). You can give an appropriate gift to a speaker at an event, provided it is commensurate with their work for the branch – for example, flowers or a voucher.

No payment or gift should be given to any RCN member of staff (whether permanent, on short term contract or secondment) or to individuals who have a regular consultancy with the RCN. This is a conflict of interest for them and if offered, any staff member/consultant should refuse payment or gift.

Where branches apply for or receive sponsorship, they must follow the RCN's guidance on ethical sponsorship. This guidance is on the RCN website – [www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/policies/income\\_generation\\_and\\_investment](http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/policies/income_generation_and_investment) – or can be obtained from the country/regional office or from the RCN Governance Support Unit, email [govteam@rcn.org.uk](mailto:govteam@rcn.org.uk).

## Fraudulent use of RCN money

The RCN is committed to the highest standards of financial governance and compliance with charity law and relevant good practice.

The RCN expects that all constituent parts of the RCN follow the same principles for the use of RCN funds. This includes branches.

The RCN has issued guidelines for the financial administration of branch funds and the holding of monies in branch accounts. Compliance with this guidance is mandatory and non compliance without good reason is not acceptable and could be taken to indicate fraudulent action or abuse of the RCN's funds.

The branch treasurer is responsible for safeguarding RCN resources, on behalf of the branch, and ensuring that RCN's funds are used in accordance with guidelines given.

The branch treasurer is also responsible for ensuring that reasonable attempts are made at achieving value for money from branch funds – for example, ensuring members do not purchase first class rail tickets for travel to RCN events, or comparing the cost of travel between public transport or private car – and so on.

Fraudulent use of RCN monies would include:

- setting up and receiving funds into unauthorised bank accounts
- diversion of funds received into unauthorised bank accounts

- payment for goods and services not required for the running of the branch or attendance at Congress
- payment for services which should be provided by NHS or independent sector employer organisations
- excessive or lavish entertaining
- any goods or services bought for personal use or for resale for personal benefit.

This is not an exhaustive list and fraud would include any activity constituting a criminal breach of trust. In this, the RCN is no different from any other charity.

If any member suspects that fraud has been committed or has concerns over a particular item of expenditure, they should report it to the RCN Internal Audit Unit (telephone 020 7409 3333). The RCN will take action under its disciplinary rules, investigate and if necessary remove the perpetrator from office, and may also prosecute.

Items which are specifically prohibited under the RCN's expenses policy include:

- all purchases of alcohol
- boarding of pets or domestic animals
- gifts to members of any sort
- first class and all non domestic travel
- purchase of mobile telephones, PDAs or Blackberries
- mobile telephone contracts or top ups (these will be part of a separate expenses policy of activists)
- costs of motoring excluding petrol or diesel.

## Conflict of interest

The branch committee should ensure there is no conflict of interest whenever branch expenditure is involved. The RCN's Conflict of Interest Policy is on the RCN website [www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/policies/conflict\\_of\\_interest](http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/policies/conflict_of_interest) (Web) (Accessed 20/10/08).

A typical example of a conflict of interest is to pay for the holding of a branch meeting or other function in a hotel or other venue which is owned by a branch officer, or their family, relatives or friends, another RCN member or other persons with whom branch officers have a special relationship or vested interest. If there is any financial benefit or other advantage to be gained from so doing, this should be declared to the other officers and the regional/country office beforehand.

## Branch finances

### Branch financial annual cycle

The annual accounting period and funding cycle for RCN branches is from 1 April to 31 March.

Allocation for funding for both the administration grant and congress monies is based on branch membership at the preceding 30 November.

### Branch administration funding

This is calculated as below:

- each branch receives £100 regardless of branch size
- there is an additional allocation per member of 15p.

Example: X branch has 1,000 members: Administration grant = (15p x 1,000) + £100 = £ 250

These amounts are correct at time of writing but may be subject to change at a later date.

### Congress funding

The number of Congress delegates a branch will receive funding for is based on the membership numbers of the branch as at 30 November the preceding year. The number of delegates is 1 per 1,000 members or part thereof. Funding is allocated on the following basis:

- number of delegates
- agreed daily subsistence rate x five days
- standard travel from the branch's region/country office.

Any delegate places not filled will result in a need to return a proportionate amount of funding to the RCN centrally. This will be determined by the registration at Congress, so it is vital that all branch delegates attending Congress should register their attendance on arrival.

Branches may apply to regional/country offices for additional Congress funding.

All expenses for Congress (as for any other expense) must only be paid out by regional/country office staff on an expense claim form, supported by the relevant receipts, in line with the RCN expenses policy. This is on the website [www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/policies/expenses\\_policy](http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/policies/expenses_policy). A delegate may be given an advance for expenses – provided the delegate signs for receipt of the advance and that they understand the conditions of that advance, which are:

- the member has to account for their spending after Congress by submitting the relevant receipts
- the member is liable for a refund for any part of the advance that cannot be supported by receipts
- refusal to refund RCN money will be considered to be potentially fraudulent and dealt with under the RCN disciplinary rules.

Congress advances are not entitlements for members attending Congress but are designed to facilitate the attendance of members who might otherwise not be able to attend for financial reasons.

To ensure that the RCN's finances are managed in accordance with good practice, Congress advances **MUST** be supported by receipts outlining how each advance has been used (e.g. accommodation deposit, final bill for accommodation, travel costs, meal receipts, parking receipts and so on).

Branches which cannot account for the use of their Congress advances will not be allowed to have advances in subsequent years. Individual members who cannot account for their advances may be asked to make a refund of the amount in full.

One member of a branch, for example the treasurer, cannot take sole responsibility for the Congress advances due to their branch. Each member attending Congress **MUST** complete an individual advance request.

### Petty cash float

The treasurer can authorise the holding of up to £50 in petty cash from branch funds in order to pay for small items expenditure. However, they need to keep receipts for all such expenditure and complete a petty cash claim form to have the petty cash float renewed.

## Branch assets

Branches may occasionally purchase equipment in order for branch officials to be able to fulfil their role efficiently, providing there are sufficient funds available in the branch accounts for both purchasing and running costs.

While this equipment is for the use of the branch official for fulfilling their role, and can be kept at their home if necessary, it legally belongs to the RCN as it has been purchased with RCN funds. Once the official steps down from their post, or the post is given to another member after the branch AGM, they must return this equipment to the branch for use by the new official.

The branch should keep a register of these assets, and declare all assets to their regional/country contact at the end of every financial year.

RCN branch assets are not necessarily covered under the RCN insurances. If a branch has a valuable asset you should notify headquarters of this, so that the item may be added to the insurance cover available.

Officials holding branch assets are expected to take due care of them and ensure they are kept securely when not in use. Any loss of RCN equipment should be reported to the RCN Finance Department immediately. Any criminal activity related to the loss or damage, e.g. theft, must also be reported to the police and a crime reference number passed on to the RCN Finance Department.

## Donations, endowments and fundraising

There are commonly three types of income that you may receive as a branch:

- unrestricted funds (usually general donations)
- restricted funds
- endowments.

These guidelines can also apply to income raised by the branch through various fundraising activities in certain instances. A brief summary of these (with examples) are as follows, this is not an exhaustive list.

**Unrestricted funds** (or '**unrestricted income**', usually **general donations**) – this is money given as a donation to the RCN without a specified purpose, for the branch's general use within the objects of the RCN.

This might include, for example, a donation given at a branch function, or money raised through coffee mornings or other branch 'events'. This assumes that the branch has not stated when organising and promoting the event that the money will be used for a specific cause or activity, nor the person raising the funds has stated what the funds are to be used for.

**Restricted funds** (or '**restricted income**') – this is income received by the RCN with specific conditions for use attached – for example, that it is used for a specific purpose, or for a specific group. This can also be money raised by the branch where the branch has stated that the fundraising is for a specific cause – for example, education of nurses in a certain branch area.

For example, a branch holds a fundraising event where the attendees have been told that the profits will be put towards sending a larger group of members to Congress. This money must not be used for any other purpose – not only would it go against good financial practice, but you risk the reputation of the branch for not keeping its promises. If the branch raises more money than it needs, it could be put towards Congress the year after, so long as it was for the same purpose.

It is the same principle for donations received for a specific purpose – for example, if someone is kind enough to donate money towards office equipment for the branch, that money cannot be spent on anything else.

**Joint fundraising** – the rules about restricted funds also apply to occasional ‘joint’ fundraising events, such as an event where 50% of proceeds go to the branch and 50% go to Macmillan Nurses. As the money will need to be banked, all of it should be entered in the account books, but the 50% owed to Macmillan Nurses should be paid out to them as soon as possible. A note about the purpose of the funds should be made when informing the regional/country contact of both the income and the expenditure, as in other circumstances the RCN as a charity should not be giving money away to other causes.

Branches are allowed to hold occasional joint fundraising initiatives, but we would not recommend that this is a regular occurrence due to the issues above.

**Endowments** – there are several different types of endowments – usually assets, funds or property donated as a source of income for the organisation. The most common type of endowment a branch treasurer could come across is a sum of money (or ‘capital’), which is invested to generate income for the branch, usually in the form of interest or dividends, and this income earned can then be spent. The ‘capital’ cannot be spent, but the income earned may be spent by the branch. In simple terms, it may be compared to money in a savings account – the original sum of money deposited remains untouched but the interest can be spent.

Endowments can also have restrictions on them which means that the income earned can only be used for a specific purpose (please see ‘restricted funds’ above.)

Generally endowments lead to additional administration and, unless a significant donation has been received, the usefulness of the income may be limited.

If a branch is approached and offered a donation in the form of an endowment, the matter should be referred to the Finance Department at RCN headquarters.

**Large donations** – all donations without restricted or specified use (‘unrestricted funds’) under £1,000 may be kept in the branch bank account for use as the branch committee sees fit.

All donations under £1,000 with restricted or specified terms (‘restricted funds’) may be kept in the branch bank account provided the regional/country branch account administrator has been informed. This is to ensure that the restricted sums are correctly recorded in the account and are only used for the specified purpose in the future.

All donations greater than £1,000 should be sent to the RCN Finance Department, so they can be deposited into the designated charitable deposit account.

## Rotation and election of treasurers

The branch constitution provides for the annual election of committee members. However, many of branch activities take place on an annual cycle, and it will take branch committee members at least a year to develop a routine for themselves. We hope that committee members will be prepared to stay in office for longer than one year to develop their own skills and to provide continuity. Nevertheless, changes are inevitable as people change jobs, move to a new location, or simply find they can no longer spare the time to take on an honorary officer position. So, during their term of office, treasurers would be well advised to consider a successor and where possible to involve them in treasurer duties.

If a treasurer stands down or resigns the position, there are various tasks to be completed, which apply to both the incoming and outgoing treasurer:

- any petty cash float should be returned by the outgoing treasurer, together with any receipts for monies spent.
- all outgoing treasurers have a duty to brief the new treasurer fully about the branch finances.
- the RCN regional/country office must be informed of the change, giving details of the name, membership number and address of the new treasurer. The incoming treasurer will then start to receive any

information normally sent to treasurers from headquarters.

- d. the incoming treasurer needs to attend an induction/training for treasurers, organised by the country/regional office, so as to better appreciate and understand their duties and responsibilities and receive a copy of this guide.
- e. the RCN regional/country office must also be informed of the change of treasurer on the branch return forms.
- f. a specimen signature of the new treasurer should be sent as soon as possible to the regional/country office.

## Assistance for branch treasurers

A treasurer's first point of contact should be the regional/country branch account administrator.

The RCN UK Finance Department is responsible for the management of the RCN's finances in accordance with Council policies. It has a duty to account for all RCN funds and monies, which include all branch monies. The Finance Department staff are happy to assist branch treasurers whenever required. If you need advice, information or assistance, do not hesitate to contact the Finance Department on 020 7409 3333.

The Internal Audit Department is responsible for giving assurance to Council, through the Audit Committee, that the appropriate financial controls are operating effectively. The Internal Audit Department will also give guidance to treasurers on issues of probity or assistance in interpretation of policy and procedures – call 020 7409 3333.

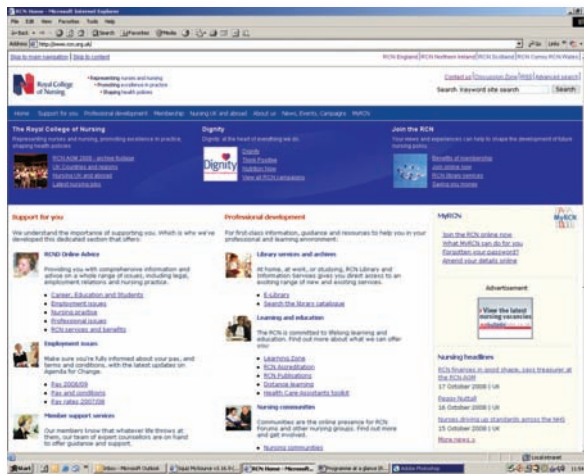
# Communicating with members

In your role as a branch officer, it is essential that you can communicate with RCN members in your branch effectively and efficiently to encourage them to engage with local activities, such as your branch AGM and the programme of events you have taken the time to organise. To help you do this, there are a number of resources available to you from the RCN.

## Online

Communicating effectively with members can present a real challenge, so it is vital that you consider new technologies to extend your potential reach to branch members.

## Website



The internet is the quickest, easiest and most cost-effective way for members to get information. On the RCN website: [www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk), members can access a wealth of information, from clinical and employment advice, pay scales and learning opportunities to the latest RCN campaigns, regional/country information and membership offers.

### Activist pages:

[www.rcn.org.uk/activist](http://www.rcn.org.uk/activist)

In addition to the RCN website, activists also have a dedicated community area on the website which can be viewed by all RCN members. Try to access the site as frequently as possible to keep up to date with activist news and up-to-date information.

### Online communities – ‘by the members, for the members’

Online communities are groups which share a website resource, or community, using cutting-edge technology to break down the physical and geographical barriers to member interaction. Online communities can include such features as news, events, feature articles, opinion polls, surveys and feedback forms, all of which can be placed on the website by members themselves. These facilities also allow you to contact other members quickly and easily.

These communities can be built around any aspect of nursing that a distinct group of members feel would benefit from forming a community. So they are an ideal opportunity for you to form a community for your branch and communicate electronically with local RCN members.

Each community will have an editor who will receive technical and editorial training to provide and upload content onto their community’s site. For details on setting up a community, becoming an editor or contacting an editor, email [webteam@rcn.org.uk](mailto:webteam@rcn.org.uk).

### RCN Discussion Zone

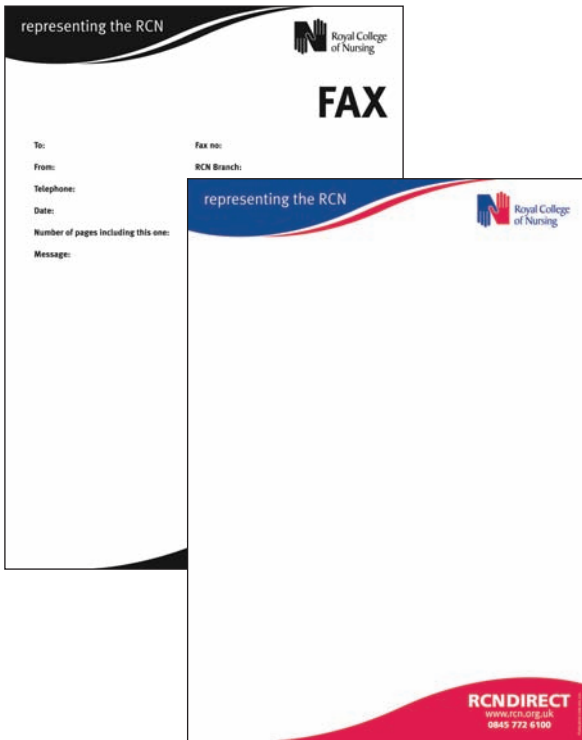
The Discussion Zone is an online area which gives you the opportunity to engage in conversation with other RCN members. The Discussion Zone is accessible from prominent areas of the RCN website as well as from the new online communities – you could link the Zone to your branch community. Or you can log on directly [www.rcn.org.uk/members/dz](http://www.rcn.org.uk/members/dz).

## Offline

### Stationery and noticeboard materials

In order to give your communications a professional edge and to make your noticeboard stand out, use the RCN branded stationery materials.

The stationery materials comprise letter headed paper, fax cover sheets, compliment slips, business cards, newsletters and flyers. You can use these to communicate officially as a member of your RCN branch committee.



The notice board materials include poster templates and pre-printed posters as well as banners and leaflet dispensers. Use these to let branch members know who you are, how to contact you, and highlight forthcoming meetings and events. Remember to use noticeboards in all the workplaces covered by your branch and not just your own; consider not just NHS workplaces but those in the independent sector, such as local nursing homes, too.



The materials are available to order from RCN Direct on 0845 772 6100. To save you time on layout, style and formatting, and to keep communications consistent you will find guidance and templates in the RCN activist area on the website: [www.rcn.org.uk/activist](http://www.rcn.org.uk/activist)

**Publications**

*RCN Bulletin* is the fortnightly newsletter which is mailed to all RCN members, with dedicated regional and country pages. Use *RCN Bulletin* to publicise local events, such as your branch AGM which must be included in *RCN Bulletin*. Do this by emailing the editor directly on [bulletin@rcnpublishing.co.uk](mailto:bulletin@rcnpublishing.co.uk) or by contacting your regional/country or board office.



*Activate* is the monthly newsletter for RCN activists. Each issue includes news on employment issues, such as Agenda for Change, political developments in health care, details on RCN campaigns and any other information useful to RCN activists in carrying out their various roles.

Ensure that you pass on any relevant information from *Activate* to RCN members in your branch, such as encouraging participation in consultations or ballots and updating on any local developments.

Contact your regional/country office if you have information or an event you would like to see publicised in *Activate*.

## Developing local networks, visibility and shaping local health policies

Branches have an important role in influencing the workplace and the local health economy. Success is often the result of hard work, good local RCN profile and a branch that has developed the right local networks. This gives the branch the opportunity and voice to influence local health policies.

Branches have also become increasingly involved in the political process, influencing local politicians around key local and national issues and during elections. This activity is underpinned by a high profile RCN both nationally and locally and well developed networks and alliances.

### Local visibility

Branch visibility is important, not only to help recruit new members but also to retain existing members through regular communications. This also helps ensure that the RCN continues to be recognised within the workplace, by other health professionals, senior managers, and local stakeholders, as the voice of nursing.

Local visibility can be achieved in lots of different ways, including:

- maintaining an RCN notice board
- establishing an online community on the RCN website
- planning regular walkabouts around wards and departments etc., to talk to members
- regular communications with members, such as a regular local newsletter or email
- putting information on your employer's website or intranet; asking for an RCN page
- asking your workplace to host a link to the RCN website
- developing a short programme of branch events during the year
- submitting an article or letter in the employer's newsletter or magazine.

### Developing local networks

Good local visibility and recognition helps a branch develop and influence local networks both inside and outside of the workplace. Being identified as the voice

and representative of nursing opens doors to decision makers.

Branches will already have relationships with a large number of local networks and these should include:

- Joint Staff Side
- other health unions
- senior managers
- other professional bodies and associations
- NHS organisation boards
- PECs – Professional Executive Committee (England only)
- local patient groups and representatives.

However, there will be other individuals, groups and networks that are influential in shaping or making workplace policies and decisions as well as making policy at a more strategic level.

This second group may include (among others):

- managers and nurses at a strategic level (SHA)
- PALs – the Patient Liaison Service
- PPIFs – Patient & Public Involvement Forums
- the local council (health overview and scrutiny committees (OSC) and local councillors)
- local campaign groups such as NHS Together.

### Shaping local decisions and health policy

Developing relationships and working with networks can be broken down into three straight forward steps:

#### 1. Know your aims and objectives (refer to the branch annual plan)

What is the branch setting out to achieve? Is it to lobby for a specific change in the workplace and if so what? Or more strategically, do you want to influence or shape health policy?

#### 2. Understand who you need to work with

You need to know how decisions are made within your branch area and beyond. Who holds power? Who and how many individuals or groups can effect change? Who really makes the decisions?

#### 3. Develop a relationship to influence decision-makers

Persuade decision-makers they want to help you achieve your objectives. Make your case for change.

Develop a good argument in support of your objectives; providing support information and data. Use examples from your own or other branch members' experiences or using information from your various networks.

Do your homework on the individual, group or network you want to influence. Find out what they want and see if you share any objectives or goals. See if you can offer solutions to the challenges they face.

Building relationships to influence can be done in many different ways. Consider introducing the RCN to decision makers by writing a letter or email. Explain who you are and what the branch does. You may wish to send a briefing on a specific issue or invite them to a branch meeting. Some people prefer to simply arrange a face to face meeting.

### Engaging with MPs and the media

Branches also have a role to play in lobbying MPs, MSPs and AMs and using the media to the benefit of their membership. When engaging with MPs and the media it is important that the branch feels confident and competent – seek advice and support from your regional/country office before any meeting or interview.

Engaging with MPs, other local politicians and the media can be extremely useful in affecting change or raising the profile of an issue. However, dealing with these individuals can be complex and if done wrong, can make a situation worse.

The RCN has communications officers at regional, country and national level to help, guide and advise members and branches in dealing with all matters relating to media and political engagement. Contact your country/regional office to find out who is your local communication officer is.

These officers are here to help members formulate strategies to engage with the media and politicians. They are experts in their field and will be able to work with you to tailor public affairs work so that you get maximum impact and the result you need.

### What can the RCN Communications team do for you?

- **Get your voice heard in the media.** Work with local journalists hear your side of the story
- **Get elected officials to support you.** By facilitating engagement between RCN members and MPs and other elected officials, you can have support your campaign, or speak out on your behalf. They can write to chief executives on your behalf, speak at meetings and meet with delegations of members to discuss issues.
- **Call on local authorities to question.** Communications officers can work with local authorities to get their health and public services committee to investigate issues at NHS employers.
- **Engage with stakeholders.** By linking with other unions, professional colleges and other groups you can make your case stronger.

# Recruiting and retaining RCN members and activists

## Why is recruitment and retention important?

### Members

Approximately two thirds of RCN revenue comes from membership subscriptions, so it is vital that the RCN continues to increase and maintain this source of income. The more members the organisation has, the more income is generated, allowing the RCN to maintain and develop membership benefits and services. Currently the RCN has over 390,000 members and is the largest nursing union in the UK. More members in the RCN means more influence and a stronger political voice. Increasing branch membership will also mean more Congress places (and associated funding) for your branch, as these are based on the size of each branch.

Visibility in the workplace is a key factor in both recruitment and retention. The more visible a union is, the more likely people are to join and to remain as members.

### Activists

The more RCN activists a branch has, the more support is available to branch members if they face workplace issues, health and safety issues or require learning and training advice. Activists can help to raise the profile of the RCN and the branch in the workplace, recruit new members and retain existing ones and organise meetings and events.

When encouraging potential members to join the RCN, it is essential to remember the following key points:

- be proactive
- be prepared and organised
- be professional.

## Key messages

Based on the range of products and services the RCN offers and those offered by other unions, the RCN marketing department has a number of key messages

for each of the RCN's key target audiences which comprises:

- students
- health care assistants (HCAs)
- registered nurses.

In addition to full membership, the RCN also provides the following categories of membership:

- EU and international nurses
- nurse cadets
- associate member – non practising
- associate member – retired
- associate member – career break
- RCN/RCM associate
- joint EIS / UCU (University and College Union).

The three key target audiences are either the biggest groups or they have the most potential. There are just a few key messages for each target audience. The reasons for this are:

- there are too many products and services to list them all
- you may forget to mention the key points if you list all the products and services
- the messages have been chosen to reflect the products and services most used or most highly valued by members who responded to the 2006 MORI customer satisfaction survey. The MORI survey also indicated that too many messages caused confusion for RCN members.

The key messages are also themed under five main benefit headings:

1. The voice of nursing
2. Personal and financial support
3. Learning and development
4. Professional support
5. Protection.

These main headings are also used in the *Welcome to your RCN* booklet (publication code: 002 642) or the *On*

*your side and by your side* booklet (publication code 002 681) which you can use as an *aide memoir* when recruiting and retaining – these can be ordered from RCN Direct publications@rcn.org.uk or telephone RCN Direct on 029 2054 6414 (voicemail).

### Key messages for students

#### The RCN is the largest nursing union:

- the RCN is nursing specific
- the RCN is a trade union and a professional body
- the RCN is the largest nursing union in the UK with over 390,000 members
- the RCN is the voice of nursing in the UK
- the RCN is well respected and passionate about what it does
- the RCN provides a voice for nurses, nursing and members of the nursing family on a local, national and international level.

#### The RCN campaigns on behalf of members

- Make the message relevant by giving an example of the sorts of issues the RCN has campaigned on for students.

#### The RCN helps you study and learn

- The RCN library is nursing specific.
- The eLibrary on the RCN website can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- The eLibrary contains arrange of resources including nursing databases, a nursing dictionary, eBooks and over 400 eJournals which are helpful for assignment writing.

#### The RCN provides indemnity insurance and representation

- RCN indemnity insurance covers members whilst on student placement.
- RCN indemnity insurance covers students for any work they are competent to do.
- The RCN provides representation for issues that arise when on student placement.

#### The RCN provides excellent value for money

- Student membership costs just £10 a year.

### Key messages for health care assistants (HCAs)

- The RCN is the largest nursing union in the UK.
- The RCN is the voice of nursing.
- The RCN provides legal advice on employment issues and personal injury.
- The RCN provides services for members such as the library information services, publications, events and website.
- The RCN gives all members £3 million professional indemnity insurance cover.
- The RCN represents and supports in the workplace.

Using the information in *Knowing the RCN* (page 33), expand on these messages to explain the benefits of membership. Give examples which are relevant HCAs, taking into account their work and the issues they face. This may include accountability, moving and handling issues, harassment, or problems with a colleague on the ward.

It is helpful if you can refer to another HCA member in your region and what membership has meant to them. This allows other HCAs identify with what you are saying.

### Key messages for registered nurses

- The RCN is the largest nursing union in the world.
- The RCN is the voice of nursing in the UK.
- The RCN campaigns on behalf of members.
- The RCN provides personal and financial support.
- The RCN helps you learn and develop, influencing practice and improving patient care.
- The RCN has something for you whatever your specialty and wherever you live.
- The RCN provides representation in the workplace.
- The RCN provides indemnity insurance cover of £3million. This is one of the highest offered in the UK.

Using the information in *Knowing the RCN* (page 33), expand on these messages to explain the benefits of membership.

Give examples which are relevant to individuals, taking into account their work and the issues they face. For example, when you are talking about specialties, talk about relevant forums, events, downloadable publications and community areas within the RCN website [www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk).

### Membership progression

RCN student members automatically transfer to full newly qualified membership for one year. The subscription rate for full newly qualified is half the rate of full membership. This provides a big cost saving and is a useful message to give to students in their final year of being a student (whether or not they are currently members).

It is worth non-members joining as students so they can

transfer into full newly qualified membership. If they join within their first year of registering with the NMC, they join on full concessionary membership category which is three quarters of the full membership rate.

There is an introductory rate available for the first year of membership for HCA members provided they have never been a member of the RCN. Those who have been an RCN student member are not eligible for the HCA introductory rate.

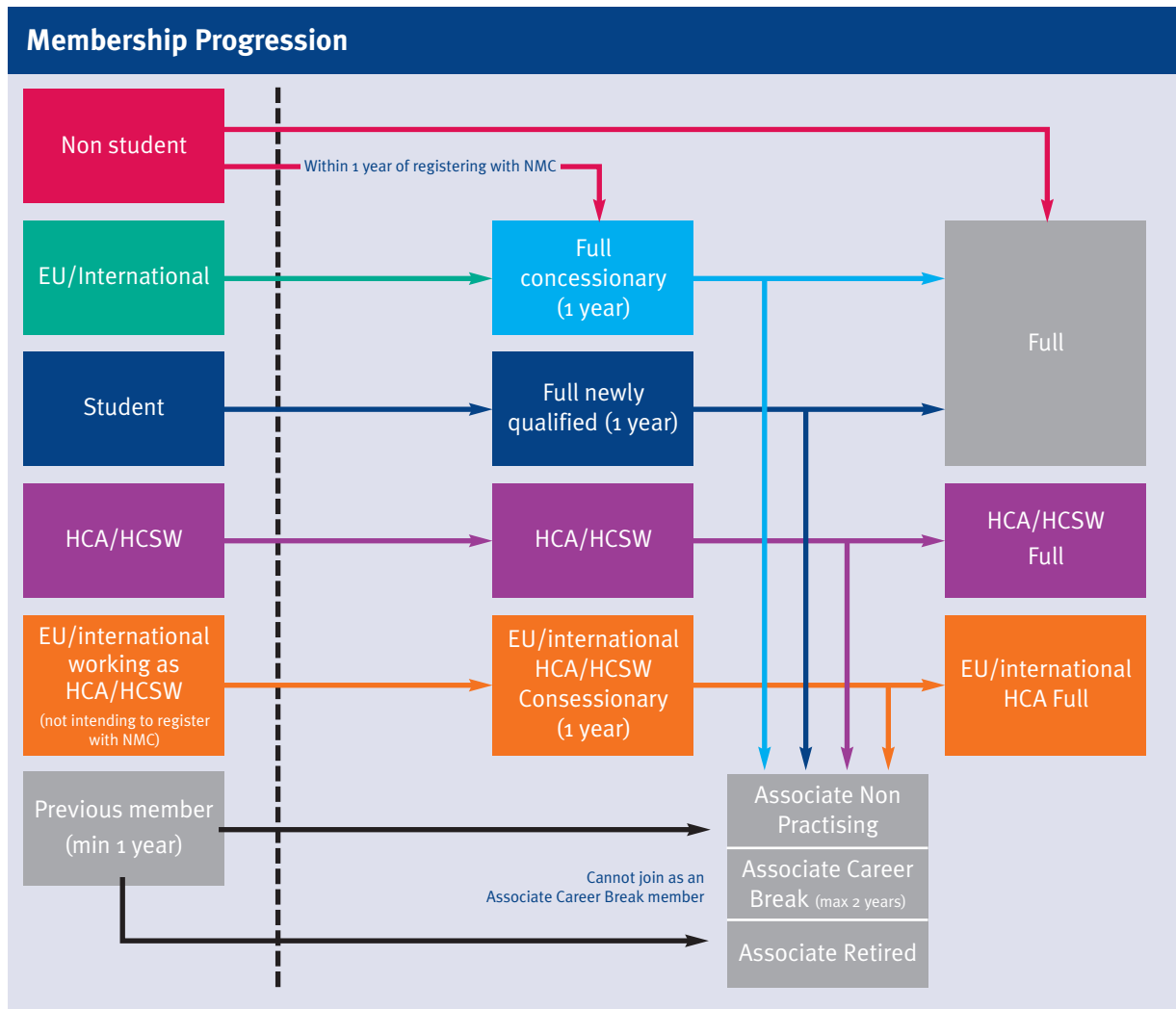


TABLE 1: KNOWING THE RCN. USEFUL FACTS AND FIGURES

Feature	Benefit
Over 390,000 members	You'll be joining the largest nursing union in the UK which was founded in 1916.
Membership is only for members of the nursing family	We are the voice of nursing. All our expertise and knowledge is relevant to nursing. Membership fees only provide benefits and services to members of the nursing family. The RCN is nursing specific. Membership includes students and health care assistants.
Library	The largest nursing library in Europe and is also available online. Essential for all members whether it is help with your studies, continuing professional development, PREP, research or updating your skills. Resources include a nursing dictionary, electronic databases including the British Nursing Index and MIDIRS, books and videos, eBooks and 400 eJournals.
RCN website	An essential resource for all members to help make the most of your membership, improve your skills, update your practice and network.
Personal injury	If you have an accident at work (or on your way to work) you may be able to make a personal injury claim and claim compensation.
Free legal advice	The RCN offers its members 30 minutes of free legal advice on non work related matters.
Publications	A range of publications are available to purchase or download free of charge online. Many of the publications relate to clinical practice so will help you to keep your skills up-to-date.
Representation	If you need specialist expert help on a workplace matter we can provide local representation through our network of local offices, branches and workplace representatives. £4,983,340 damages recovered on behalf of members (2005/06) through personal injury claims and employment tribunals.
RCN Direct 0845 772 6100	The Advice Contact Centre is open 7 days a week 8:30am – 8:30pm providing information & advice on a wide range of issues, including employment matters. You can also find advice via the website at <a href="http://www.rcn.org/direct">www.rcn.org/direct</a> . The Membership Department deals with subscriptions, updating personal details etc., and is open 8:30am – 8:30pm Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays). If you have a query about nursing, RCN Direct is an invaluable resource.
Counselling service (see Member Support Services)	If you feeling that you're struggling to cope with work and home issues, you may need more than advice and practical help to cope. The Counselling Service offers you a safe space to explore and resolve your personal difficulties.
RCN Events	Helping you to keep-up-date, improve your practice, debate and network with colleagues.
Specialist journals	RCN Publishing publishes the weekly title <i>Nursing Standard</i> plus ten specialist titles. Special subscription rates are available to RCN members and will help you to update your skills and improve your practice.
Indemnity insurance cover up to £3 million	If you cause harm in the practice of your profession to another person, they may seek compensation. Indemnity insurance will provide you with cover in the event of a professional negligence claim. It gives you peace of mind when you're at work.
Good samaritans clause	This is part of the indemnity insurance and will protect any member providing medical attention outside of work. This includes going to the assistance of someone at a roadside accident, first aid at PTA events, brownies, cubs etc.
Member Support Services – the new structure for the RCN's Counselling, Welfare, Careers & WING services	If you're worried about debt or money management issues or are facing hardship, you can discuss your options with an RCN Welfare Adviser. The Careers Service provides information on job applications, CVs, interview skills, courses and educational opportunities available. WING stands for Work Injured Nurses Group and its primary function is to give information and personal support to all RCN members affected by injury, ill health or disability.
RCN discounts	A way of making your money go further with discounts on high street shopping vouchers and offers on holiday car hire, gym membership, theatre tickets and much more.
RCN financial products	Working with Liverpool Victoria (under the branding RCN Membership Services) to offer a range of financial products at competitive rates. Products include home, motor and life insurance as well as saving and investment plans.
RCN Learning and Development Institute	Offer a range of solutions to help you learn and develop including leadership programmes and practice development.

For details on the entire range of RCN products, services and membership benefits, go to the RCN website [www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk).

Table 2, on page 35, will help you to understand how to make a feature into a benefit. A feature is a product or service that we offer. A benefit is what it means to the prospective member or member, whether it's in their work life or personal life. Phrases to show this are 'so what that means for you is ...' and 'you'll find x really helpful when ...'

### The RCN compared with other unions

A potential member may ask you why they should join the RCN and not another union. Take a professional approach by concentrating on the reasons why the RCN should be the preferred choice rather than why they should not join another union.

### The RCN's selling points

- The RCN is a trade union and a professional body. The RCN offers continuing professional development to ensure career development for members, improving their practice throughout their career to provide better patient care.
- The RCN is the largest nursing union in the UK (390,000 members).
- The RCN is nursing specific – the voice of nursing.
- Members can claim tax relief on their subscriptions which enables them to save on their full membership rate.
- There is no qualifying period to access any membership benefits including indemnity insurance, representation and legal assistance. Issues must relate to a period of time when you were a member of the RCN but the protection starts immediately.

## Handling objections and addressing misunderstandings

If prospective members raise objections or misunderstandings about the RCN, unions or nursing, ensure you understand the objection and provide a clear and confident answer.

- Pinpoint and understand the objection; reflect rather than dismiss. Acknowledge the objection, saying "thank you for raising that issue".
- Do not interrupt or anticipate what the person is trying to say. The person will be more relaxed and receptive if you let them finish what they were saying.

- Do not place undue emphasis on any objection. It may simply be a question. Don't treat it as a negative as it highlights an issue which is important to a potential member.
- Do not treat an objection as an unjustified question, by facial, vocal or body expression.
- When answering an objection, avoid an argument by using such phrases as "I suggest" and "as you know."

### Responding to objections and misunderstandings

See table 2 on page 35.

## Using the membership application form

When recruiting face-to-face, use the application form. Familiarise yourself with the form and show potential members the sections they need to complete.

Explain that it will only take a couple of minutes to complete the form and offer to help complete any sections they're unsure of. Always offer to help, because if people have literacy problems they are unlikely to ask for help.

### Bank details and direct debits

You can find bank account details on cheque books, debit or switch cards. An account number usually has eight digits and the bank sort code is a six digit number.

- RCN direct debits are taken on the first working day of each month.
- If you join between the days 01 and 16 in the month, payment is collected on the first day the following next month.
- If you join between the days 17 and 31 in the month, payment is collected on the first of the following month after.

When you take an application form from someone, remember to welcome them to the RCN and explain that their welcome pack will be sent to them in the post.

Welcome packs contain an RCN badge, handbook and membership card. RCN Direct process membership applications and aims to send welcome packs to members within ten days of their application form being received.

TABLE 2: RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Objection or misunderstanding	Response
I'll pay my £10 to you as a student member because you're a charity so I'll be giving to nursing. I'll join UNISON as they're a trade union.	The RCN is a trade union and a professional body. We also have charitable status. The RCN can provide you with ... and then go on to sell the benefits of joining the RCN.
You are not a proper trade union	The RCN offers the same if not more cover than other unions. Our indemnity insurance is £3 million for example, which is one of the highest. We provide workplace representation throughout our network of representatives and our RCN officers. Recently we've campaigned for (give an example – pay, deficits or pensions). In addition to being a trade union the RCN is also a professional body which means we can provide you with ... (sell the benefits). The RCN provides the national staff-side secretary for the NHS Staff Council which looks after the pay and conditions of all NHS staff.
Membership fees are too high	You can claim tax relief on your membership fees as we are a professional body making your membership even better value for money. The RCN also has a range of financial services (such as car insurance) with preferential RCN member rates. There is also a Discount Shopping service. Emphasise the range of products and services – library, forums, events, website and the value for money they offer.
RCN will not go on strike	In 1995 RCN nurses voted for a new Rule 12. It states that: <p>"It is a fundamental principle of the College that its members shall not act in any way which is detrimental to the well being or interests of their patients or clients. Without prejudice to this fundamental principle, the Council is empowered to authorise action by members of the College in furtherance of an industrial dispute and to make regulations governing the procedure to be followed. This Rule may not be altered, amended, added to or repealed other than by resolution of the College in general meeting passed by no less than a two thirds majority of the members present or voting by proxy."</p> <p>Rule 12 is sometimes described (inaccurately) as the RCN's 'no strike clause'. This is not the case – Rule 12 would allow a withdrawal of labour if Council could be satisfied that there would be no harm to patients or clients. To date the RCN has not sanctioned strike action although we have balloted for industrial action a number of times. Fortunately, our skilled negotiation has always resulted in resolution so the action has not been necessary.</p>
RCN is a weak union	The RCN has demonstrated its commitment on issues that members face through campaigning. The deficits campaign is a good example of this. Though this was an England-specific campaign, make reference to their relevant region/country website for details of further campaigning. Give local examples to add emphasis. Our strength comes from the fact that the RCN is nursing specific and the largest nursing union in the UK.
The RCN won't support students working as HCAs during their training	This is something other unions sometimes say and they are referring to indemnity insurance. This is not true. The RCN's indemnity insurance does cover students working as HCAs during their training.
The RCN now accepts HCAs into membership. I'm a trained nurse and I thought the RCN was just for nurses.	Following consultation with our members, many of our members are keen to bring the health care assistants they work alongside into the RCN to make sure we represent the breadth and depth of the nursing family. <p>As HCAs take on an increasing amount of work previously carried out by the registered nurse, the role of HCAs should be firmly placed in the family of nursing. As the numbers of registered nurses is predicted to certainly plateau and health care support workers themselves become regulated, the RCN's ability to influence the nursing agenda will potentially decline if it doesn't more fully embrace the HCA market.</p>
I work part time so why should I pay the same price for membership as someone who works full time?	All the membership benefits are available to you no matter what you earn or how many hours you work. We do not reduce membership benefits because you work part time or earn less. Most people join for the indemnity insurance and representation which is a bit like your home insurance – paying the policy each year but not making a claim. However, if you do need representation or to make a claim, that's the time when you'll really see the value of it. Not everyone makes the most of their membership so it's worth looking at whether or not you do as there's much more to membership than indemnity insurance and representation. Then talk about the benefits. If you work less than 37.5 hours a month you can transfer to a career break category for a maximum of two years.

# Organising a branch event

## Choosing your event

Everyone can make a contribution to organising an event. Working as a team allows you to match tasks with people's skills.

Before you begin, identify the kind of event you would like to organise. You may wish to run a recruitment event or you may prefer to consider existing members and concentrate on retention – it's important not to forget your existing members. Take time to reinforce the benefits of membership and find out what services members currently use.

### Running a recruitment event

Identify those you would like to recruit using a mapping exercise. Using your local knowledge, consider your workplace situation. Are there some areas where the number of RCN members is low? Consider areas where there are a large number of part-time workers, health care assistants, overseas or newly qualified nurses who are not very well represented in terms of membership. Approach them and help them to understand the benefits of RCN membership and why they should be a member. They may become a future advocate for the RCN and help to recruit.

Involve testing in your approach so you can try out your techniques and review any which are not working. Are you giving out lots of application forms but not getting many members joining? If something works well, share this with your colleagues.

## Running an event

### Getting people to attend

Use notice boards to display posters or flyers to publicise the event. Invite:

- colleagues
- RCN staff and activists
- existing members who can endorse the benefits of RCN membership
- any local dignitaries
- your local councillor.

### Where to target your audience

- Induction days at employers
- Recruitment events
- Student freshers' fairs
- Educational / CPD events
- One-to-one meetings
- Workplace walkabouts
- Drop in surgeries
- Unexpected opportunities
- Websites (in your workplace or the RCN website)
- Noticeboards
- Nurses' Day
- Targeted events for HCAs or overseas nurses.

### Preparing for an event

Don't try and do everything by yourself – ask for help from colleagues. Discuss ideas with your colleagues and develop your event plan. Allocate event responsibilities according to experience and expertise.

Allocate each part of your team with a specific task and remember that some people are not comfortable with sales and may not want to get involved in the face-to-face selling. They may prefer to work in the important 'backroom team' that helps organise events.

Liaise with your regional/country office as they may be able to provide you with a banner, stand and a tablecloth which will give you RCN branding. Letting the regional or country office know will also avoid duplication of effort.

You can access the stationery pack containing newsletter templates, blank posters and notice board headers from the activist area on the RCN website: [www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk).

### Work out what you need

- Calculate your budget, and stick to it.
- Consider ordering presentation equipment.
- Remember the basics, such as chairs.
- Include refreshments in your budget and allocate responsibility for production. Ask those invited if they have any special dietary requirements.

- Do not overstaff an event. Judge when you are likely to experience the busiest times and increase numbers then.
- Use presenters or speakers with good communication and people skills. Good communication skills are more important than expertise, but have one expert in the team to whom you can direct difficult questions.
- Consider your invitations, any presentation, lighting and sound equipment required
- Consider developing an event plan. The form below can be amended to suit your needs
- Have a checklist of the items you need to take to the event.

Use the Event Plan Form and the Checklist for Events (included in Appendix eight, page 64) to ensure you don't forget anything essential (you can also download the forms visit the RCN website at [www.rcn.org.uk/branchhandbook](http://www.rcn.org.uk/branchhandbook) ).

### Ordering publications

A number of non-chargeable publications are available to order for use at recruitment events. Many can be downloaded from the RCN website [www.rcn.org.uk/publications](http://www.rcn.org.uk/publications) .

To place an order, email: [publications@rcn.org.uk](mailto:publications@rcn.org.uk) or telephone RCN Direct on 029 2054 6414 (voicemail). Please quote:

- your name and your RCN membership number
- the publication code and the title of the publication
- the quantity you require
- the full postal address to which the items are to be sent
- the date by which the items are needed
- if appropriate, special instructions for how the boxes should be labelled.

Allow two weeks for delivery.

### On the day of the event

- Circulate your event plan to your team members.
- Show presenters how the equipment works.
- Have a rehearsal before the event.
- Ensure all the equipment is working.
- Ensure everyone is wearing their badge.
- Ask those invited if they have any special

accessibility requirements.

- Use the local media for advertising, and follow up press releases you send.

Enjoy the event and use it as a celebration of all the hard work you and your team have put into the initiative.

### What shall I do if I am asked a question and I do not know the answer?

Never pretend to know an answer when you do not. Ask a colleague for assistance. If you are unable to answer the question at the event, say you will find out and get back to them. Write down their contact details and a brief note to remind yourself of the query and then follow it up. If you receive a complaint, take down the details and pass it on to the relevant person.

If there are situations that you find difficult to handle and would like further assistance, contact your regional/country or board office for advice.

On the activists' area of the RCN website [www.rcn.org.uk/activists](http://www.rcn.org.uk/activists) , you'll find some recruitment and retention tips and techniques in the resources section.

# Equality and diversity

The RCN wants to be a world-class champion of diversity, equality and human rights within the health and social care sector.

Branches are powerful agents for promoting the equality and diversity agenda and a core part of the RCN achieving its strategic goals.

As well as taking into account relevant discrimination legislation, branch members should also consider the impact on individuals' morale. It is important that all members feel welcome and comfortable in the branch environment and making constructive use of difference by valuing diversity can be a useful way of ensuring that a safe and supportive environment is created for all members and potential members.

You will find more information on discrimination legislation in the FAQs area on the RCN website: [www.rcn.org.uk/support/diversity/diversity\\_strategies/relevant\\_awards](http://www.rcn.org.uk/support/diversity/diversity_strategies/relevant_awards).

## What is valuing diversity?

Diversity is essentially about the differences that exist between us. These differences may be based on our age, faith or belief, sexuality, race or ethnicity, gender or even our educational and work backgrounds, technical skills and cultural values.

When you actively value diversity, you make constructive use of those differences to achieve positive outcomes, add value and maximise opportunities to work effectively.

Valuing diversity is based on the idea that people should be valued as individuals for the wide range of skills, talents and experiences that they are able to bring to situations.

### Guiding principles for branches

Branches should consider the following principles when planning and carrying out any activities:

- *Mainstreaming equality of opportunity and valuing diversity is about developing and implementing excellence in working practices and relationships.* This will enable branch members to interact in an environment free from discrimination, victimisation and harassment.

- *The best working practices are those recognised and known to be fair and equitable.* These should be inclusive, transparent, evidence-based and made solely on the grounds of merit. Such decisions are more likely to achieve positive outcomes, accessible to all groups.
- *Branch members are its most valuable resource.* Branches benefit from diversity when they are able to make constructive use of differences to achieve better outcomes for members.
- *Achieving equality and diversity within the branch needs a clear and tangible commitment to action and good practice.*

### Respect, language and politeness

Treating all branch members with a high level of respect will help improve the branch effectiveness, encourage new members to join and improve the retention of existing members.

It is important to remember that language has the power to both include and exclude individuals. Some of the terms that we tend to use may not reflect how some people and communities view themselves.

Communication in any language involves far more than just words. Much of what we say uses a wide range of unconscious and instinctive features including intonation, emphasis, volume, pace, contact and non-verbal gestures. Politeness is a very important part of both written and verbal communication – but be aware that this may vary between cultures.

## Diversity action planning

Producing a good-quality plan with tangible outcomes is key to valuing diversity and implementing equality of opportunity at all levels, including within the branch structure.

Branches should be able to ensure that they are able to deliver at least two outcomes related to diversity. You need to monitor these, and report back to the RCN about them at the end of the financial year when you complete your accounts.

## How do you develop an action plan?

### Step 1

Include all members of the branch committee when developing your action plan.

Ask:

- how do we want our branch to be in terms of valuing difference?
- what needs to change to achieve this?
- what do we need to do more?
- how will we know when we have achieved our goals?
- what successes have we had elsewhere? How can we transfer that success to this area?

### Step 2

Write down three things that you can change. Consider doing a few things well rather than spreading your efforts too thinly and break each one of these into smaller more manageable tasks.

### Step 3

Write down your progress against these tasks.

## Checklist for diversity and equality

Below are a series of questions which function in much the same way that a risk assessment would to ensure that diversity and equality issues are really part of what the branch does and the way that it carries out its activities.

- What is the aim or purpose of the activity or policy? It could potentially be anything from a campaign on a particular issue or a new way of working together within the branch.
- Who is intended to benefit and in what way?
- How does the policy or activity help us to promote valuing diversity and implement equality of opportunity?
- What are the intended outcomes of this activity or policy?
- What is the likely impact of this policy or activity or initiative on different groups?
  - age
  - different racial or ethnic groups
  - disability
  - gender
  - Religion, faith or belief
  - sexual orientation
- What evidence is there to support this?
- If adverse impact is identified can the policy or activity be changed to reduce or eliminate the adverse impact?

A more detailed version of the diversity impact assessments for NHS organisations is contained in the *diversity champions' electronic toolkit*. Contact the RCN diversity team for more information [diversity.team@rcn.org.uk](mailto:diversity.team@rcn.org.uk).

## Ideas for action

Think about what really will make a difference to what matters. Can your branch co-ordinate how the following are carried out in your area?

- Identify members' priorities when bargaining on behalf of different groups of members. For example, for black workers, appointment and promotion are possible priorities; for disabled workers, the top priorities can relate to reasonable adjustments for access.
- Determine priorities on equalities. This can include aims and targets for equality issues such as action to recruit new women, black, disabled and lesbian and gay members to make the branch as representative as possible.
- Ensure that equality and diversity issues are placed firmly on the branch's agenda, particularly if there are issues that members wish to take forward to AGM and the RCN Congress.
- Ensure that important meetings do not clash with major faith holidays celebrated locally. You will find multi-faith calendar on the BBC website: [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/) (web) (Accessed 20/10/08).
- Get involved in local and national equalities campaigning as appropriate, on issues such as race hatred, homophobia, xenophobia, disability or worklife balance.
- Ensure the branch is representative of the local nursing workforce in your patch.
- Ensure a wide range of members to stand for election on regional/country boards and RCN Council.

### Sample branch diversity action plan

You may wish to use the template below to help you get started on diversity issues. It is helpful if you can break the tasks down into smaller and more manageable chunks.

For example, if you want to ensure that your branch is fully representative of the local nursing workforce, one of the tasks you could undertake is to investigate any staff networks such as an LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) network or BME (black and minority ethnic) workers support group.

Email the completed template to the diversity and equality unit when you send in your financial returns at the end of each financial year. Email: [diversity.team@rcn.org.uk](mailto:diversity.team@rcn.org.uk)

### Sample branch diversity action plan

What do we want to achieve?	Tasks needed to achieve goal	Progress
<i>Ensure that all NHS organisations on the patch comply with equalities legislation.</i>	<i>Sign up to become diversity champions.</i>	
	<i>Organise training on diversity and equalities by emailing <a href="mailto:diversity.team@rcn.org.uk">diversity.team@rcn.org.uk</a> for assistance.</i>	
	<i>Check that employers have available their gender, disability and race equality schemes as well as employer equal opportunities policies.</i>	

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## Appendix one:

### RCN branch committee members: role descriptors

<b>Collective role – RCN branch committee</b>	
<b>Summary of role</b>	
To ensure, on behalf of the members, that the branch meets the purposes and responsibilities defined in the RCN branch constitution and in accordance with RCN policy and protocols and the RCN Code of conduct.	
Accountability: The branch committee is accountable to the board through the annual branch review, and to the branch members at the AGM.	
1	To organise the branch and its activities in support of the RCN's purpose in accordance with its policies and procedures, the branch constitution, and any guidance/ protocols issued by the RCN.
2	To be responsible for the financial stewardship of RCN branch funds.
3	To deliver a programme of events and meetings to meet the needs of members and representatives.
4	To recruit members and activists to meet branch membership targets.
5	To act on behalf of the branch in the exercise of its representative and voting rights.
6	To identify all the workplace units within the branch area and aim to have a link representative in each workplace unit.
7	To foster activity in all workplaces within the branch area.
8	To ratify the workplace elections and removal of RCN accredited representatives, in line with the RCN policy.
9	To co-ordinate collective branch action on any matter affecting the interests of nurses and the nursing profession in line with RCN policy and the <i>Industrial action guide for RCN members</i> . <a href="http://www.rcn.org.uk/publications">www.rcn.org.uk/publications</a> .
10	To promote professional awareness and development by organising local professional activities and ensuring there are appropriate links in place with national forums.
11	To lobby on behalf of nurses and nursing within RCN policy.
12	To regularly communicate with branch members and link members in workplaces units.
13	To have concern for the well-being of members who are in adversity and/or ill-health.
14	To implement and monitor branch diversity and equality activities as part of the branch annual plan.
15	To comply with and promote the RCN <i>Code of conduct</i> and other governance policies.
16	To work in partnership with RCN staff, ensuring there is good communication and that local issues are reported to the regional/country office.
17	To be accountable to the relevant board and submit an annual plan and review of its activities to the relevant Board for approval.

### Specific Role – RCN branch chair

#### Summary of role

To provide leadership to the branch and to members of the branch committee, to ensure that the branch functions effectively and helps to deliver the *RCN Strategic plan*.

1	To ensure that the branch complies with the RCN Branch Constitution and that the branch committee provides proper branch management and financial stewardship (in conjunction with the branch treasurer).
2	To co-ordinate the effective teamwork of the branch committee.
3	To chair branch and branch committee meetings, ensuring that they comply with the RCN branch constitution and contribute to the effective functioning of the branch.
4	To ensure that communication is maintained between the branch and the RCN regional/country board.
5	To be responsible, with other committee members, for developing and submitting an annual plan of branch activities to the relevant RCN board.
6	To lead on the resolution of any internal membership disputes within the branch.

### Specific Role – RCN branch secretary

#### Summary of role

To be responsible for the effective administration of the branch and the committee.

1	To act as the main point of communication in all matters both internal and external to the branch.
2	To make all practical arrangements for branch and branch committee meetings.
3	To draft meeting agendas (in conjunction with the chair), to distribute meeting agendas and papers, and ensure accurate notes are taken and appropriately distributed.
4	To organise the branch annual general meeting (AGM); ensuring that the meeting arrangements comply with the branch constitution and protocol, and that all paperwork is completed both prior to and subsequent to the meeting.
5	To ensure proper organisation of all workplace and branch election processes in accordance with RCN election procedures.
7	To maintain regular contact with RCN staff at the regional/country office and to keep them informed of branch activity and issues.
8	To be the point of contact with workplace link representatives in order to support them in their role.
9	To be responsible, with other committee members, for developing and submitting an annual plan of branch activities to the relevant RCN board.

**Specific Role – RCN branch treasurer****Summary of role**

To be responsible for the financial stewardship of branch funds in accordance with RCN policy and protocols.

1	To protect branch funds from fraud and abuse.
2	To ensure that branch income and expenditure comply with the RCN branch protocol and policy, and the RCN Charter.
3	To present financial information to members and to the branch committee.
4	To present annual financial statements to the branch AGM.
5	To liaise with the identified RCN regional/country staff in matter relating to branch accounts.
6	To be responsible, with other committee members, for developing and submitting an annual plan of branch activities to the relevant RCN board..

**Specific Role – RCN branch honorary president****Summary of role:-**

To be an ambassador for the branch and the RCN

- A branch may elect an honorary president annually. As an honorary role the president will not have a decision making role within, or for, the branch
- The honorary president should be an RCN Member (any category) and should live within the branch catchment area or region.

1	To preside over any official RCN branch functions as requested
2	To support the branch to deliver the RCN mission and strategic plan
3	To be an ambassador for the branch and the RCN as a whole, and to represent the RCN branch at functions as appropriate
4	To comply with and promote the RCN <i>Code of Conduct</i> and other governance policies.

## Appendix two: Branch constitution

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The RCN branch is the local membership structure through which the RCN organises local representation of nurses and nursing, promoting excellence in practice, and shapes local health and social policies.
- 1.2 The geographical boundaries of the branch will be determined by the relevant board. Any change in title or boundary of the branch will be made by the board and be notified to Council.
- 1.3 The branch is accountable to the relevant board and shall submit an annual plan and review of its activities to the relevant board for approval.

### 2 Branch membership

- 2.1 All RCN members working in workplaces within the branch's geographical boundary will be members of the branch.
- 2.2 Any RCN member who is not employed but whose home address falls within the geographical boundary will be a member of the branch.
- 2.3 All branch members will have full voting rights in respect of all branch elections.

### 3 Purposes of the branch

- 3.1 The purpose of the branch, is to recruit and retain, support and develop members and activists, and to help deliver the *RCN Strategic Plan*. This is achieved through:
- enabling learning and development, leadership and support for professional and trade union activity
  - providing communication and networking opportunities for RCN members locally
  - providing a focus for local RCN visibility and local activity
  - providing a local RCN structure and its associated accountability.

### 4 Representative and Voting Rights of the Branch

- 4.1 The branch sends voting and non-voting representatives to the RCN Congress in accordance with the constitution of Congress.

4.2 The branch can submit items to the Congress Agenda Committee for consideration, and if the item is selected, will nominate a member of the branch to propose the item at Congress.

4.3 The branch can nominate members to stand for election as RCN President and Deputy President, Chair and Vice-Chair of Congress and the Council Members from their Country/Region, in accordance with the RCN Charter and Bye-Laws.

4.4 The branch can nominate members for election to their board in accordance with procedures agreed by RCN Council.

4.5 The branch can have a branch honorary president. They should not have a decision-making role within or for the branch. Branch members should elect them annually at the AGM. Any member of the branch can nominate a member of the branch as branch honorary president. To be valid, each nomination must be seconded by a branch member, and should be put to the vote at the AGM.

### 5 Branch organisation

5.1 The branch committee is responsible to the board for the conduct of all branch matters, acting on behalf of branch members.

5.2 The branch committee will be made up of a minimum of three members and a maximum of six, including the roles of branch chair, secretary and treasurer.

5.3 The chair, secretary, treasurer and other committee members should be elected annually at the branch AGM. Any member of the branch can nominate themselves at the AGM. To be valid, each nomination must be seconded by a branch member, and should be put to the vote at the AGM. No member can occupy more than one of these roles concurrently.

5.4 No member can serve for longer than eight consecutive years on the branch committee. After eight years on the committee, the member must have a gap of at least two years before being eligible for re-election to the committee.

5.5 The quorum of a branch committee meeting is three members of the committee.

5.6 The secretary is responsible for informing the relevant RCN office of the names of members elected or co-opted as members of the branch

- committee immediately after their election or co-option and the branch ratification or removal of any RCN representative.
- 5.7 The members of the branch committee shall be recognised as the leaders of the branch, who are competent to act on behalf of the RCN at local level. They shall have a duty to act within the policies of the RCN and to be mindful of the image of the RCN in all their activities and decisions.
- 5.8 The committee can co-opt members to fill any casual vacancy on the committee until the next branch AGM.
- 5.9 The committee is accountable for the organisation of the branch to the board and to branch members at the branch AGM.
- 5.10 The committee is responsible, on behalf of the members, for:
- 5.10.1 organising the branch and its activities in support of the RCN's purpose in accordance with its policies and procedures, the branch constitution, and any guidance/ protocols issued by the RCN
- 5.10.2 the financial stewardship of RCN branch funds
- 5.10.3 delivering a programme of events and meetings to meet the needs of members and representatives
- 5.10.4 recruiting members and activists
- 5.10.5 acting on behalf of the branch in the exercise of its representative and voting rights
- 5.10.6 identifying all the workplace units within the branch area and aiming to have a link representative in each workplace unit
- 5.10.7 fostering activity in all workplaces within the branch area.
- 5.10.8 ratifying the workplace elections and removal of RCN accredited representatives, in line with the RCN policy
- 5.10.9 co-ordinating collective branch action on any matter affecting the interests of nurses and the nursing profession in line with RCN policy and the guide for RCN Members on Industrial Action
- 5.10.10 promoting professional awareness and development by organising local professional activities and ensuring there are appropriate links in place with national forums
- 5.10.11 lobbying on behalf of nurses and nursing within RCN policy
- 5.10.12 regularly communicating with branch members and link members in workplaces units
- 5.10.13 having concern for the well-being of members who are in adversity and/or ill-health
- 5.10.14 supporting equality and diversity at all branch activities
- 5.10.15 complying with and promoting the RCN Code of Conduct and other governance policies.
- 5.11 The committee should work in partnership with country/regional staff ensuring there is good communication and that local issues are reported to the regional/country office.
- ## 6 Branch meetings
- 6.1 The branch committee will arrange a programme of meetings and events to meet the needs of members and activists. Such meetings should have a defined purpose and members should receive notification of these events.
- 6.2 The branch must hold at least one branch general meeting for all members, each calendar year, the Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- 6.3 The branch AGM will take place in September or October each year, and the date and venue should be notified to all branch members using RCN communication channels, at least three weeks in advance of the meeting.
- 6.4 The purpose of the AGM is to receive the branch annual report and the financial statements up to the end of the previous financial year (31 March), to elect the branch committee, and to ratify the elected RCN representatives.
- 6.5 An Extraordinary General Meeting of the Branch will be convened if the chair so determines, or on the written request of twenty (20) members of the branch, provided notification of the date and venue goes to all branch members through RCN communication channels, at least three weeks in advance of the meeting.
- 6.6 The quorum for any general branch meeting, including the AGM, is ten (10) members, including three (3) committee members.

6.7 The branch committee may set up any other committees or arrange regular meetings of another other segment of their branch membership.

## 7 Workplace units with the branch

7.1 The committee and the staff shall together identify all workplaces within the branch's geographical boundaries, within the NHS, educational establishments and the voluntary and independent sectors.

7.2 RCN workplace units may be set up in any workplace, the purpose of which is to provide a visible RCN presence within the workplace, to be a point of contact to RCN members, to recruit new members, and to provide individual or collective representation in the workplace or place of study.

7.3 The workplace units will work within the policies of the RCN and may formulate responses to the employer's consultation and negotiation on professional and employment issues arising in the workplace or place of study.

7.4 The branch will delegate appropriate roles and powers to the workplace unit. The full powers and rights set out in this constitution remain with the branch and take precedent over the powers and rights delegated to the unit.

7.5 The RCN accredited representatives i.e. stewards, safety representatives and learning representatives, will be elected from and by the RCN members in the workplace unit, in a manner determined by the RCN protocol issued by Council and overseen by the branch committee.

7.6 A link representative can be selected in each workplace unit by the RCN accredited representatives in that workplace, who will be accountable to, and in regular communication with, the branch committee, and will be responsible for coordinating the election of RCN stewards, safety representatives and learning representatives in that workplace and they will notify the branch of the election results for branch ratification.

## 8 Finances

8.1 One member of the branch will be elected to act as treasurer for the branch. They will be a member of the branch committee.

8.2 The treasurer is responsible, on behalf of the branch committee for the financial stewardship of branch funds, ensuring they are expended in pursuit of the RCN objects as embodied in the Charter and protecting them from fraud and abuse.

8.3 All branch funds must be kept in the branch's designated sub-account of the RCN corporate bank. There must not be any other branch bank accounts All transactions through the bank account must have two signatures from amongst the agreed signatories.

## 9 Amendments to the constitution

9.1 Council has the power to vary this constitution, or make other provisions for the conduct of branches, in such manner as the Council, at its discretion, may from time to time determine.

9.2 Council will produce readily available guidance and protocols for branches on how to operate aspects of this constitution.

## 10 Dissolution

10.1 The branch may be dissolved, merged with another branch or its geographical boundaries altered by the board. Before making such a decision, the board will consult the branch members at a general meeting of which due notice has been given, and Council shall subsequently be notified of the decision.

10.2 Where such a decision is made, the board shall be responsible for the transfer of branch funds and assets to the new branch that the members will be part of.

**Agreed by Council: [June 2008]**

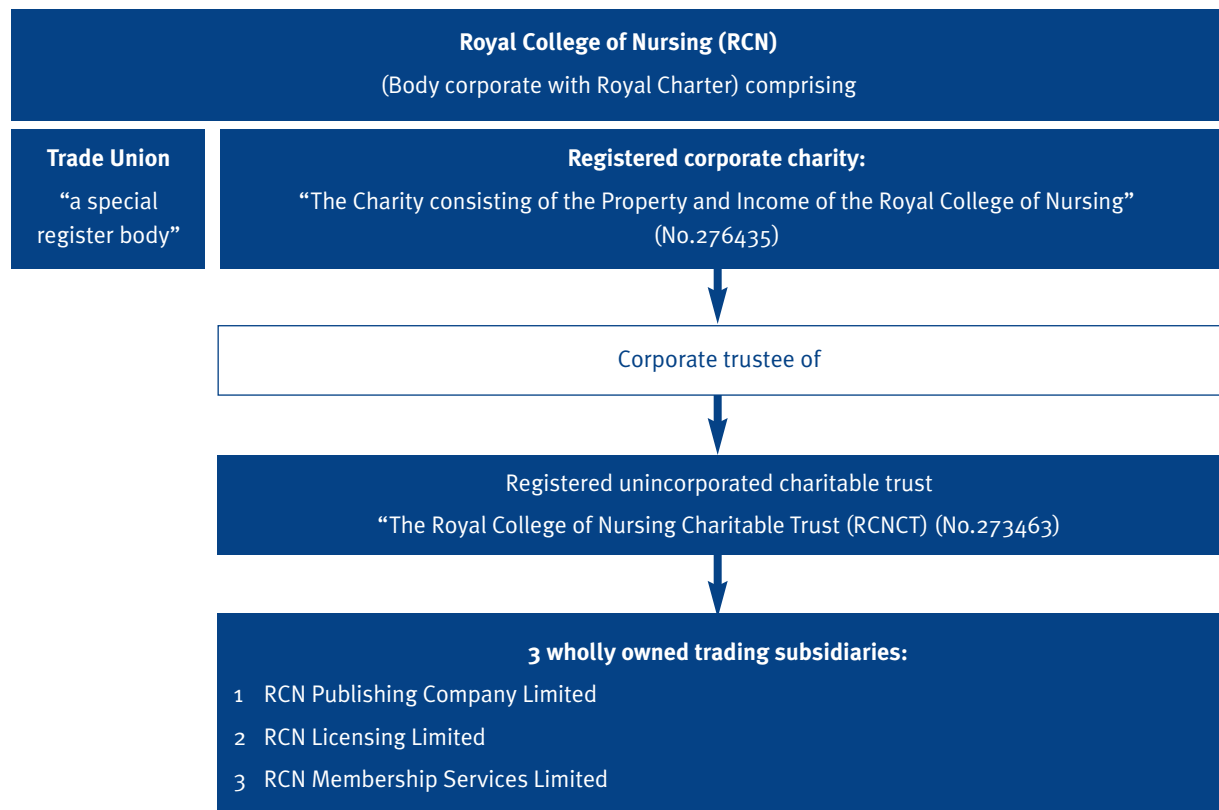
## Appendix three: Governance and legal structure

### Congress

Congress is the main way members influence the RCN's policy agenda. It is a representative body consisting of representatives of all the different constituencies within the College and the way Congress works is currently being reviewed to ensure members views are being represented by the current structure.

### Legal structure

The RCN is a membership organisation set up under Royal Charter and has a trade union and two charities within it.



### What do we want to achieve?

We are working to:

- deliver clear, timely, well-informed decision-making
- ensure that the wider interests of the RCN are taken into account in its decision making
- be responsive to the views and concerns of our members
- achieve open, two-way discussion between the council members, members and staff.

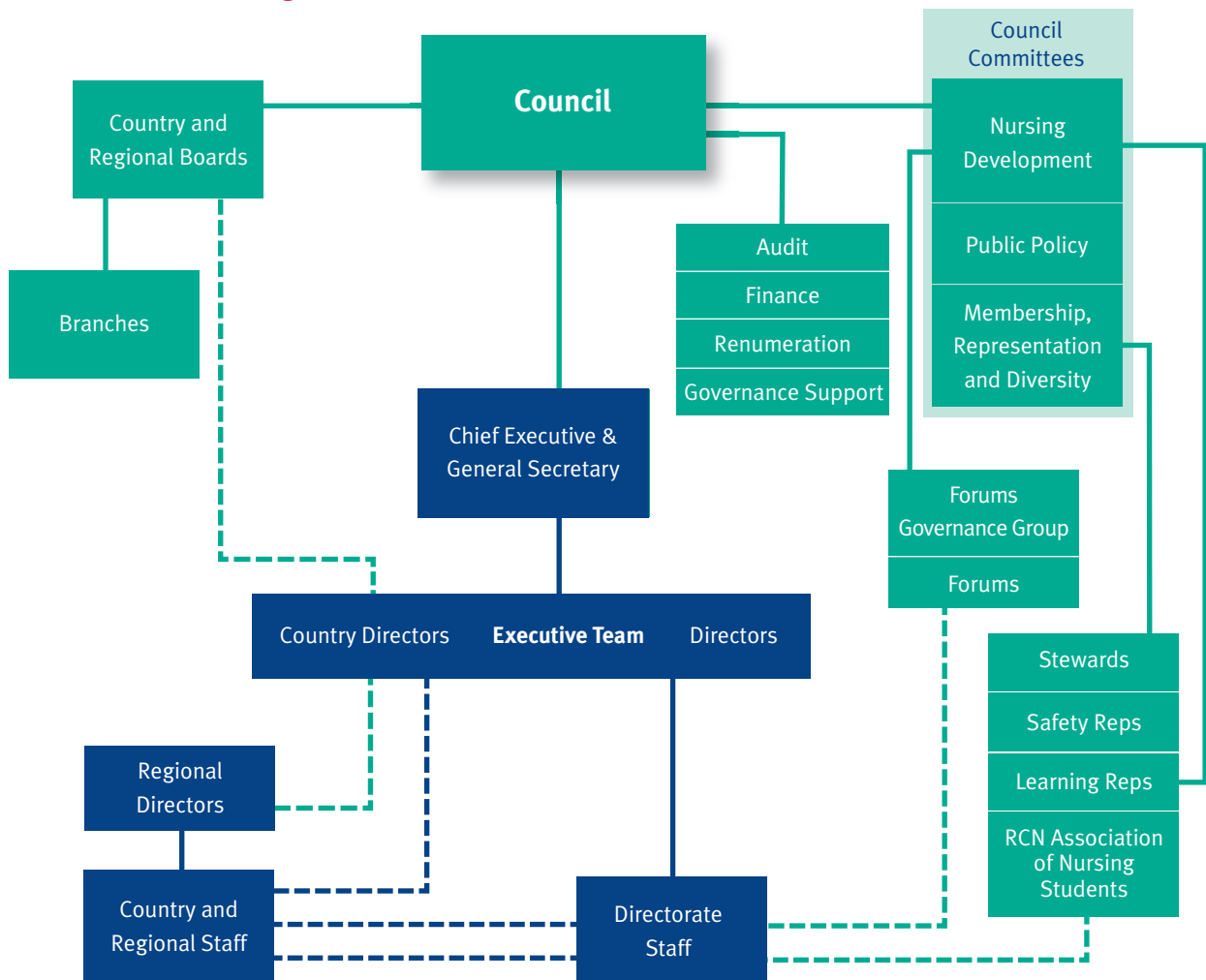
### How do we do this?

There is:

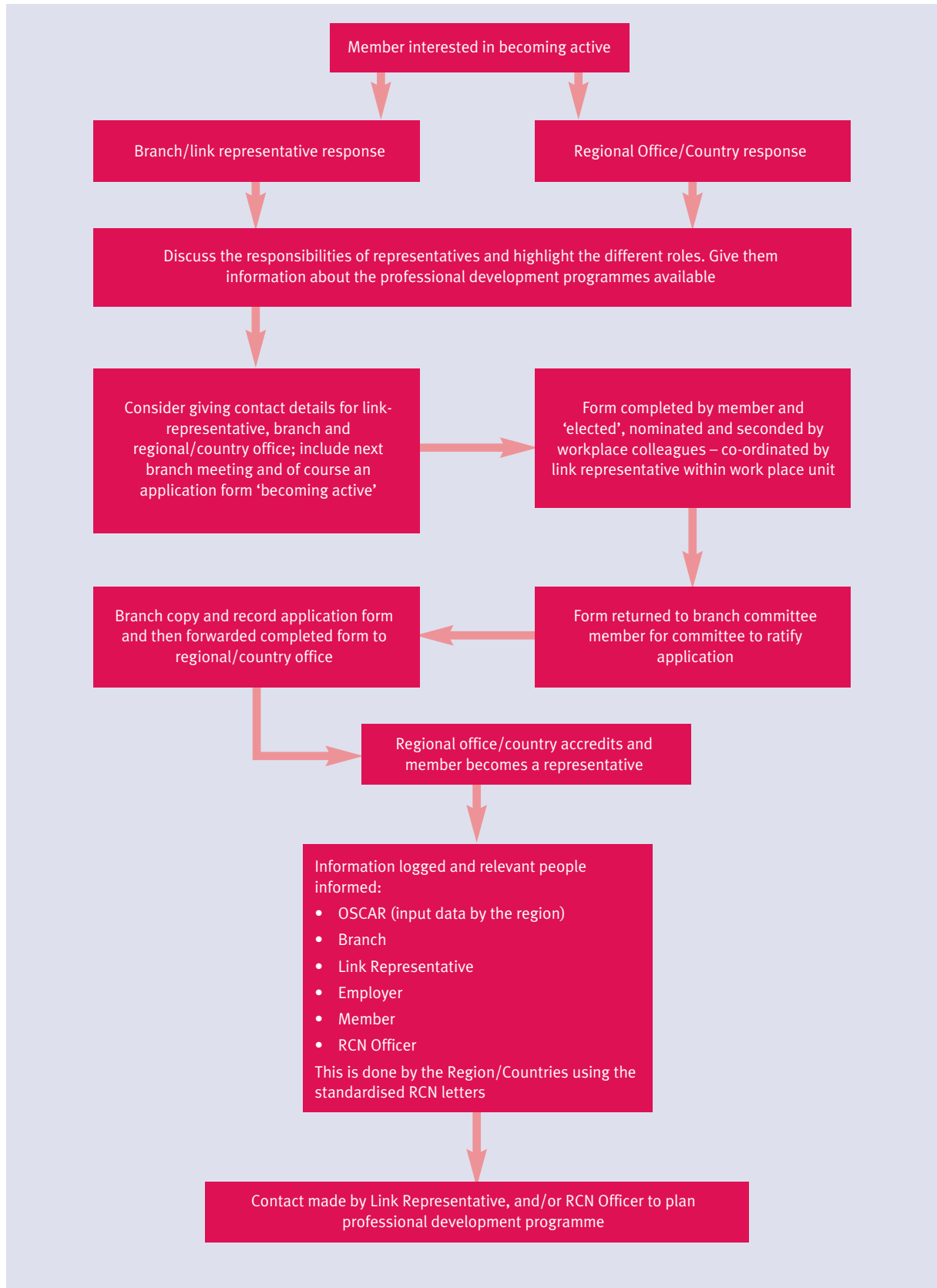
- A representative Council that is responsible for the overall governance of the RCN and acts as the organisation's conscience in delivering its statutory purposes. Council members are the elected representatives of the membership in their country or region. They also act as charity trustees and uphold the RCN's compliance with trade union legislation.

- Four governance committees to assist the Council with particular aspects of its responsibilities:
  - the Finance and Corporate Services Committee which advises the Council on its financial strategy
  - the Audit Committee reviews the RCN's financial and risk controls and the RCN's Annual Financial Statements and advises the Council on these
  - the Remuneration Committee agrees the remuneration and terms of employment of the General Secretary and members of the UK Executive Team
  - the Governance Support Committee which supports council in ensuring the most effective governance arrangements and practices are in place.
- Strong involvement of independent external advisers on our main governance committees
- Three Council Committees to assist with policy development on professional issues and provide a sounding board for staff. The Chairs of the Committee are members of Council. All other national groups feed in through these Committees.
- Three Country and nine Regional Boards advise and support their Directors on matters relating to the Country/Region. Board members are elected to represent the Country/Regional membership. The chair of the board is one of the two Council members and provides the link between the Council and the board. It is through the boards that Council is informed about the views of members on key strategic decisions.

**Governance and management structure**



## Appendix four: Accreditation of RCN representatives: summary



## Appendix five: RCN Code of conduct

### RCN Code of conduct

Members of Council, boards and all RCN committees and other elected positions have a duty to:

#### Selflessness

- Act solely in the best interests of the RCN.
- Never use your position to gain any financial or other benefits for yourself, your family or friends.

#### Integrity

- Avoid putting yourself under any obligation that might influence you in the performance of your RCN role(s).
- Avoid any appearance of improper behaviour, as well as actually avoiding impropriety.

#### Objectivity

- Be objective in carrying out RCN business.
- Make appointments, or recommend individuals for awards and honours solely on merit.

#### Accountability

- Be accountable to the members, funders and the public for your actions and decisions and submit yourself to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to your role.
- Not act as if delegated by any group you represent. You are not bound, when speaking or voting, by mandates given by others.

#### Openness

- Be open about all your actions and decisions and about your part in reaching collective decisions.
- Ensure where matters are held to be confidential, the reasons are within the RCN policy, and that you maintain that confidentiality.

#### Honesty

- Refuse gifts or hospitality that others could reasonably think would influence your judgment, or be intended to influence it.
- Declare any personal interests relating to your RCN duties and to adhere to the conflicts of interest policy, in a way that protects the RCN interests.

### Leadership

- Promote and support these principles by leadership and example.
- Always show respect in your dealing with other people and act in a way which preserves public and professional confidence in the RCN.

Any breach of the Code is handled under the provisions in the RCN Rules.

### Approved by Council on 9 November 2005

[www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/policies/rcn\\_code\\_of\\_conduct](http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/gov/policies/rcn_code_of_conduct)

## Appendix six: Success criteria form

### Annual branch review success criteria form

This form will help the branch to complete its annual review/plan. The branch will need to undertake a self-assessment of whether it has achieved its goals and aspirations by setting its own key performance indicators. This should then be reflected in its annual review/plan.

To complete the form, please CIRCLE either Yes or No, or fill in the details where asked.

Reference to representatives includes health and safety representatives, learning representatives and activists.

If you have any additional comments to make regarding any of the questions, please add these in the 'Comments' column.

<p><b>Branch details</b></p> <p>Branch name: _____</p> <p>Number of members: _____</p>
--

<b>Success criteria 1:</b>			<b>Comments</b>
<b>Is the branch complying with the current constitution?</b>			
Did the branch hold an AGM?	Yes	No	
Was appropriate notice given to members using: Workplace posters RCN Bulletin Other (state)	Yes	No	
The following branch leaders were elected at the meeting: • Chair • Secretary • Treasurer • Committee members (3)	Yes Yes Yes Yes	No No No No	
Were RCN representatives: • Accredited • Re-accredited • Dis-accredited	Yes Yes Yes	No No No	
What was the total number re-accredited? How does this compare to previous year?			
What is the ethnic and gender make-up of accredited RCN representatives? How does this compare to the previous year and the membership profile?	(Data can be requested from RCN Direct membership records)		

<b>Success criteria 1:</b> <b>Is the branch complying with the current constitution?</b>			<b>Comments</b>
How many of the representatives work in the:			
Independent sector			
NHS			
How does this compare to previous year?			
Was the branch financial statement made available to those attending the AGM?	Yes	No	
Did members from the branch attend Congress?	Yes	No	
Total number who attended	(Voting)	(Non voting)	
Has the branch annual review and plan been developed or in development	Yes	No	

<b>Success criteria 2:</b> <b>Level of branch activity and membership engagement</b>			<b>Comments</b>
Did you plan a programme of branch events? How many members attended branch events?	Yes	No	
Did the branch develop a diversity action plan? If yes, what were the main successes?  If no, why not?	Yes	No	
Did you hold any of the following events in your branch <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committee meetings</li> <li>• Representative development meetings</li> <li>• Professional development events</li> <li>• Other (please specify)</li> </ul>	Yes Yes Yes Yes	No No No No	
Did any visiting speakers attend events organised by the branch? If yes how many?	Yes	No	
Was information from the RCN board discussed at branch meetings? (e.g. reports)	Yes	No	
How many workplaces have you identified within your branch? (in NHS and independent sector)			
How many workplaces have RCN workplaces meetings and activities?			
Do any of the following attend any branch events? Country/regional board member RCN Officer	Yes Yes	No No	
Has the branch submitted a resolution or plan to for Congress? Has the branch organised a fringe event or plan to for Congress?	Yes Yes	No No	

<b>Success criteria 3: Recruitment and retention</b>			<b>Comments</b>
Did the branch committee have a recruitment programme for membership/students?  (Data can be requested from RCN Direct membership records)	Yes	No	
Did the branch committee have a recruitment programme for representatives?  (Data can be requested from RCN Direct membership records)	Yes	No	
Did branch members take part in recruitment activities? (Please give details)	Yes	No	
What percentage of branch members are active as			
• Health and safety representatives?		%	
• Stewards?		%	
• Learning representatives?		%	
• Forum representatives?		%	
Does the branch have any Diversity Champions in membership?	Yes	No	
How has it worked with them?			
What percentage of the branch accredited representatives are actively engaged in representative work?		%	
How many branch representatives attend workplace representation committee meetings?			

<b>Success criteria 4:</b>				
<b>Level of branch communication</b>				<b>Comments</b>
Does the branch maintain an online community for its members?		Yes	No	
What other methods do you use to communicate with your members?				
Do you have link members:		Yes	No	
• in workplace units?		Yes	No	
• within forums?		Yes	No	
How do you communicate with your geographical representative on the board?				
How do you communicate with the regional/country office?				
The branch was involved in lobbying		Yes	No	
• Locally		Yes	No	
• Nationally		Yes	No	
Has the branch been in regular contact with local MPs/MSPs/AMs/MEPs?		Yes	No	
Do any branch members regularly attend local Health Board/PCT/Health Scrutiny Committee meetings or similar meetings?		Yes	No	

Is there any other help/support your branch needs from the RCN?

Are there any other comments you would like to make?

## Appendix seven: Template for developing a branch annual plan

### Annual branch review and Annual plan template

(Refer to the Branch Handbook (page 17) for guidance on completing the report and also refer to the completed branch success criteria form (Appendix 6, page 52) for relevant information to support the content of the annual report).

Country:	
Region:	
Branch:	
Year planned:	
Date plan agreed:	

#### Who involved – enter names below

<b>Branch committee members</b>
Chair:
Secretary:
Treasurer:
<b>Representatives</b>
<b>Members</b>

### Summary of previous year and vision for coming year

Report from committee members –

- Focusing on the successes and challenges of the branch and how this will influence its planning for the coming year (100 to 150 words) – note, the three reports can be merged into one and finalised as the branch chair report if repetition becomes an issue.

#### Branch chair report:

#### Branch secretary report:

#### Branch treasurer report:

## Review of the previous year

### What went well

This may be regular meetings, good attendance, increases in number of members or representatives, a successful conference or study day, involvement in lobbying or campaigning, fundraising activity.

### Why was it successful?

### What was not achieved?

For example, a planned study day that had to be cancelled.

**Why it was not achieved and what lessons can be learned**

For example, lack of support for the study day.

**Proposals and plans for future activities and events using the RCN's 10 strategic aims**

Think about the RCN's mission "The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies". Use the ten strategic goals to promote discussion. What can the branch do within each of these strategies? –

(refer to the *RCN's Strategic Plan 2008-2013* [www.rcn.org.uk/publications](http://www.rcn.org.uk/publications) for more comprehensive details about the strategic goals):

Some suggestions:

- run a member recruitment campaign
- run a representative recruitment campaign
- contact local forum groups and develop joint activities
- arrange a study day or branch conference
- network with adjacent branches and plan joint events
- identify a local issue and focus on this. For example, violence, changes to a service, equality and diversity
- promote the branch to any independent sector organisations
- develop a branch newsletter

**Build a membership organisation which values both the professional and trades union functions, and whose power is enhanced by their working together.**

Consider activities encompassing both values. This could be achieved by networking with other branches and forums.

**Engage the full breadth of clinical and workforce talents, experience, and expertise of members and staff.**

If considering study/training days, ensure they are relevant to the audience. Try focusing on the audience's development, aiming to enhance their knowledge and skills.

**Strengthen the RCN as the leading authority on nursing in health and social care.**

Consider engaging with local health scrutiny committees or attending local health forums in the community or organising a Congress fringe event.

**Embrace the wider nursing family, furthering strategic activities in our membership make-up, our networks, and with employer organisations that recognise the RCN.**

Consider a recruitment campaign for membership as well as for activists. Training/development day should focus on promoting development opportunities which could be adapted to meet specific health care workers and activists.

**Campaign for nursing, health care and patients.**

Consider local lobbying of MPs, MSPs, AMs, or submitting an agenda item at Congress.

**Strengthen accountability in our governance structure.**

Plan the branch's AGM and consider attendance to RCN's AGM.

**Maximise the RCN's contribution to improving the health and well-being of the national, EU, and international population.**

Consider contributing to a consultation on a document that has been circulated at national level that will impact locally.

**Enabling structures and processes to value diversity**

Taking into account the diverse make-up of the branch's membership, ensure all activities are accessible and appropriate. Consider study/training/recruitment campaigns that will promote such groups to engage with the RCN, as members and activists.

**Build the RCN as a business, to enable an efficient membership organisation.**

Consider resources to be used for events and activities by planning the branch’s spending for the coming year to maximise value for money.

**Communicate the responsibilities the RCN has given its current charitable status and consider how this should develop in the future.**

When deciding on activities and events, think about ways these events promote a positive image of the RCN and the branch. Also consider opening study days to non-members (though a cost will need to be applied).

**Planned future meeting dates**

**National** Example: AGM, Congress and Council meetings, Nurses’ Day. (Enter event and date)

Event	Date
Event	Date
Event	Date

**Regional/Country** Example: Board meetings, regional/country events, conferences. (Enter event and date)

Event	Date
Event	Date
Event	Date

**Local** Example: AGM, local activities and events. (Enter event and date)

Event	Date
Event	Date
Event	Date

PLANNED OBJECTIVES FOR THE COMING YEAR

Description of activity	Budget and other resources (£)	Objective	RCN staff identified	Links with other forums or external bodies
<i>e.g. Newsletter</i>	<i>Printing xx.xx Mailing xx.xx</i>	<i>Twice a year</i>	<i>RCN staff</i>	<i>Publishing department</i>
<i>e.g. Study day - 30th September 2008</i>	<i>Room hire xx.xx Speaker xx.xx Catering xx.xx Equipment xx.xx Promotion xx.xx</i>	<i>Professional development topic - nurses in palliative care.</i>	<i>RCN officer</i>	<i>Events</i>

## Appendix eight: Event plan form and checklist for events

### Event plan

Name of event

---

Type of event

---

Event date and timings

---

Postal address of event venue

---

---

Contact details at event venue

---

---

---

Names of branch members and reps attending the event, including mobile contact numbers

---

---

---

---

Profile of the prospective audience e.g. members/non members, HCAs, part time workers etc

---

---

---

Number of people expected to attend

---

Is this a chargeable event?

Cost

---

Catering requirements

---

---

Equipment requirements

---

---

---

Evaluation of the event

---

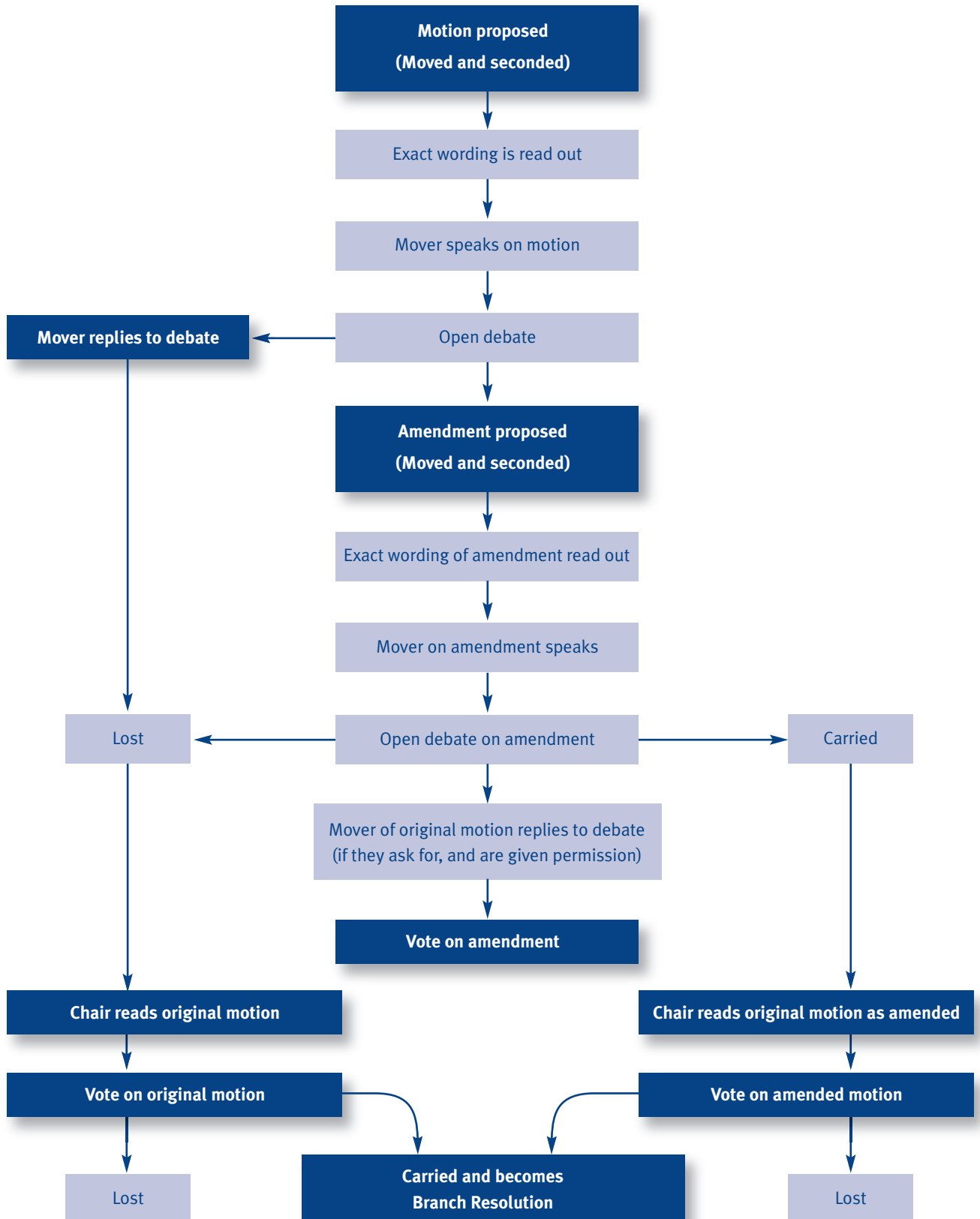
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## Checklist for events

Item	Tick
<p><b>RCN banner stand.</b> Order from your regional/country office to make you more visible at events.</p>	
<p><b>Application forms and envelopes</b> Take at least 30% more than the number of people you are expecting. Give envelopes to those who would prefer to complete the form later. Order these from RCN Direct Publications (029 2054 6414)</p>	
<p><b>RCN Publications</b> There are a number of publications which are free of charge to members and can be ordered from RCN Direct for use at events. Refer to the RCN website: <a href="http://www.rcn.org.uk/publications">www.rcn.org.uk/publications</a></p>	
<p><b>Branded promotional items</b> Ask your regional/country office if they can provide you with promotional items, such as pens, lanyards and post it notes.</p>	
<p><b>Blank posters</b> Print off posters from the Activist Zone: <a href="http://www.rcn.org.uk/activist">www.rcn.org.uk/activist</a></p>	
<p><b>RCN carrier bags</b> Order from RCN Direct.</p>	
<p><b>Tablecloth</b> To provide a more professional look.</p>	
<p><b>Cash Box</b> Ask your regional/country office. Ensure it is secure.</p>	
<p><b>Receipt book (liaise with regional/country office)</b> Get this from your regional/country office as need to complete receipts for members paying by cash.</p>	
<p><b>Clip boards</b> Useful if space is limited.</p>	
<p><b>Pens</b> For completing application forms. Tie pens to clipboards.</p>	
<p><b>Stationery items</b> For example, sellotape, scissors, blue-tac, string and parcel tape.</p>	
<p><b>Notepad</b> For recording member queries in one central place.</p>	
<p><b>RCN badges</b> Ask your regional/country office.</p>	
<p><b>Business cards</b> These are available in your stationary kit.</p>	

## Appendix nine: Formal motion procedure – example



## Appendix ten: Defining terms

### Accreditation

A formal declaration by the RCN that the member is approved to operate in a particular role. The RCN accepts responsibility for the actions of the member in the performance of the role and is covered by indemnity insurance. The administrative process involves informing the member, the employer and updating the member's record. Once accredited, the representative shall be entitled to the rights defined by the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. Additionally safety representatives are covered by the Safety Committees and Safety representatives Regulations 1977. There is no legal definition of 'accreditation' and the term can be used in a variety of ways such as accreditation of a training programme to demonstrate that it achieves a certain standard of quality.

### Branch constitution

The principles by which the branch is governed.

### Bye-laws, rules and royal charter (RCN)

Like any organisation, the Royal College of Nursing must operate within and be bound by a set of rules. The RCN's rules are appropriate for its status as a trade union, and written in language which, for legal purposes, is minutely precise. Where the rules refer to the RCN Charter and Bye-Laws, it means the Charter and Bye-Laws which were approved by Her Majesty the Queen in Privy Council on 20 December 1987 and amended on 9 April and 15 November 2000.

### Congress

The RCN Congress meets annually and is the delegate body of the organisation. It is empowered to request the Council to take action on any matter within the RCN's objectives. Council can either take the action or report back the reasons for not taking action. Congress is the main way members influence the RCN's policy agenda.

### Council (RCN)

Council is responsible for the overall governance of the RCN and acts as the organisation's conscience in delivering its statutory purposes. Council members are the elected representatives of the membership in their country or region. They also act as charity trustees and uphold the RCN's compliance trade union legislation.

### Ratification

The formal consent of the branch confirming the election. RCN representatives will be accountable to a branch so the branch must confirm the election of a representative. The representative must be a member of the branch which covers the workplace.

### Recognition

The RCN is an independent trade union which is recognised by the NHS. Some independent sector organisations also recognise the RCN for the purpose of collective bargaining. Where the RCN is not so recognised by an employer, there is no statutory right to time off to undertake any duties except to accompany an employee at a disciplinary or grievance hearing.

The issue of trade union recognition changed with the introduction of the Employment Relations Act 1999 (ERA) 3. The Act gives workers the legal right to collective bargaining by a recognised trade union, provided there is clear support in the workforce, and that at least 21 people are employed. This applies to the NHS and some other employers, but does not apply to all employers in the independent sector. If your employer does not recognise trade unions and you believe there is sufficient support then contact your RCN regional/country or national office, or RCN Direct on 0845 772 6100 who will advise you further.

### Trade union representatives

Any full RCN member can be elected as a representative in any of the three roles of steward. The term of office is for one year but representatives can continue in role, subject to annual ratification by the branch.

Trade union representatives are elected members of the RCN, in accordance with the branch constitution, who act as the link and conduit of information between members and RCN Council. The representative role is clearly defined within employment legislation and this gives certain rights, such as time off to carry out duties of the role. There are three types of trade union representatives:

- stewards
- safety representatives
- learning representatives.

To find out more about these roles see:  
[www.rcn.org.uk/support/becoming\\_activist/  
what\\_is\\_a\\_representative](http://www.rcn.org.uk/support/becoming_activist/what_is_a_representative)

### **Stewards**

Support and represent members in the workplace. Their role is to promote workplace employment rights and ensure that members are treated fairly.

### **Safety representatives**

Represent the health and safety interests of members at work and work with employers to ensure a safe and healthy working environment for RCN members.

### **Learning representatives**

Support the learning and career development of RCN members in the workplace through enabling members to meet continuing professional development requirements for safe and effective practice.

### **Workplace election**

RCN representatives have to be elected according to RCN rules. Being formally elected gives the representative confidence to act on behalf of members when consulting and negotiating with employers.

This handbook updates and replaces all previous versions. The handbook is downloadable in Adobe™ PDF (Portable Document Format), which allows the RCN to ensure you have the most up-to-date information available. We will highlight any amendments or updates on the RCN website, so you will be able to print off and update your handbook as appropriate. The handbook can be downloaded from [www.rcn.org.uk/branchhandbook](http://www.rcn.org.uk/branchhandbook).

#### **RCN Legal Disclaimer**

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Royal College  
of Nursing

The RCN represents nurses and nursing,  
promotes excellence in practice and  
shapes health policies

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